

Mitsubishi Cuts Development Time in Half, Boosts Customer Responsiveness with Cognizant-built .NET Solution

Situation

Mitsubishi Polyester Film, Inc. (MPF) has long been a world leader in the manufacture of polyester film. The company has more than forty years of experience in the industry and is currently a division of Mitsubishi Plastics Inc.

Mitsubishi has manufacturing operations in Germany, Indonesia, Japan and the United States. Its manufacturing facility in the U.S. is a 193-acre site in Greer, South Carolina, that covers more than a million square feet. The manufacturing process continues 24 hours a day, which means that Mitsubishi has to operate at peak efficiency at all times.

And it does. The Film Material Flow (FMF) plant-floor system, operating on a proprietary minicomputer, had been state-of-the-art when it was introduced years earlier. With an already old system and learning the operating system would be discontinued, the company decided to undertake a move to a new platform in 2005. That challenge also provided a number of opportunities for the company. Trained staff for the legacy system had become increasingly difficult to find; the move to a more modern platform would increase the availability of technical support and ease maintenance.

Perhaps most significantly, the move to a new platform would enable Mitsubishi to continue, and even enhance, its ability to meet customer

requirements. "We are in an industry that calls for increasing customization -- both in the products we provide and in the ways in which we work with customers -- and ever-shorter cycle times to deliver that service," says Nancy Laye, IT Director, Mitsubishi Polyester Film. The proprietary, monolithic nature of the original custom code for the FMF system couldn't address these needs easily, and often necessitated workarounds to enable Mitsubishi to meet customer requirements.

"We established and maintain our leadership position based in part on how we deliver against customers' special requirements," says Laye. "We wanted a system that would continue to enable us to meet and exceed these requirements."

Solution

Mitsubishi considered several options for its new FMF system, including a solution from a leading enterprise resource planning provider. Instead, it chose a custom solution constructed with Microsoft .NET technologies. "We were looking for the least expensive, least cumbersome, and most responsive solution with the greatest agility," says Laye. "We felt we could get that with the reusability and flexibility built into .NET."

But how the company implemented its .NET solution was critical. The project would be large and the company needed the FMF system to be recreated quickly and successfully. Mitsubishi considered its options.



“We decided to outsource -- but we realized that just handing the project over to someone else wasn’t going to be an effective solution,” says Laye. “We had never outsourced a major project before and we needed to get it right.”

Mitsubishi looked at 10 potential providers and their offshore delivery models. It conducted due diligence, requesting proposals, doing interviews, and eventually making a selection.”

That selection was Cognizant, a Teaneck, New Jersey-based provider of global IT and business process outsourcing services. “We were impressed by Cognizant’s processes -- and its enthusiasm,” says Laye.

Laye and her colleagues were impressed with Cognizant’s processes and one of the key processes was Cognizant’s Transform while Perform™ (TwP) methodology. Far from creating a solution in isolation and involving a client only for key milestones, Cognizant uses TwP as a way to involve the client in every step of the solution process. The TwP framework -- which is technology agnostic -- helps enterprises shift their IT investments from costly applications maintenance to new strategic initiatives that generate increased business value. This was exactly what Mitsubishi wanted.

The TwP process works through collaborative workshops that help clients to identify their IT strengths and weaknesses, gain a better understanding of their business imperatives, and create a roadmap to enable tighter business-technology alignment.


The second factor that led Mitsubishi to hire Cognizant was the latter’s readiness. “From the beginning, Cognizant was ready to roll,” says Laye. “They’d done their homework. They knew what was in every document I’d sent them. In the initial interview with Cognizant, their enthusiasm was contagious. It helped to overcome any skepticism on our side.”

Before starting the engagement, Cognizant consultants held a detailed conversation with each of Mitsubishi’s key stakeholders to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the current system, the measures of success, the potential barriers to that success, and the objectives of the new project. The content of these conversations was merged into a comprehensive summary.

Cognizant then assembled a team of professionals proficient in .NET technologies as well as in Mitsubishi’s legacy system code. This team developed basic process maps and identified key questions to ask during the joint requirements planning session, as well as a list of key participants crucial to the success of the joint requirements planning meeting. Mitsubishi also identified staff -- from programmers to testers -- who would undergo orientation sessions on the processes to be reengineered, in order to speed the adoption process.

With this preparation complete, the two companies met for a joint workshop to identify solution priorities and project objectives. Eighteen

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Project Snapshot:  MITSUBISHI POLYESTER FILM	
Who	Mitsubishi Polyester Film, Inc. (MPF), a division of Mitsubishi Plastics Inc.
What	Migration of legacy plant-floor system built to run on proprietary minicomputer to new Web services application architecture constructed with Microsoft .NET technologies. Project freed IT staff to focus on more strategic activities and enabled MPF to more efficiently address customer product and service requirements. These requests previously took weeks or months and can now be implemented within days or weeks.
Where	Greer, S.C., plant with a million square feet that operates 24 x 7.
How	Used Transform while Perform™ and Two-in-a-Box™ methodologies to tighten IT-business alignment planning and speed time to value.
When	July, 2005 to July, 2006; half the time MPF expected.
Why	Legacy system was difficult to customize and expensive to maintain; support personnel were becoming increasingly scarce.

constituents from Mitsubishi met with four consultants from Cognizant for two days at an offsite location.

The workshop opened with a presentation from Mitsubishi to lay out the company's business expectations for its new FMF system. Then the participants divided into smaller brainstorming teams by functional areas.

“The TwP process enabled us to proceed more quickly and effectively than we could have otherwise.”

“The smaller teams talked about things that could hamper the project or be barriers to communication,” says Laye.

These smaller teams mapped their key processes and divided each into separate functions or tasks. Cognizant business analysts then created use cases and presented what they understood the new system's requirements to be. They then sought validation from the entire Mitsubishi team.

“This was good for everyone since, with a big system like this, groups normally work in silos,” says Laye. “This process fostered the opposite -- all members of the team learned what the entire system entailed, which sparked other ideas and questions that often don't come out or, if they do, only come out later during implementation. This helped us get a better product.”

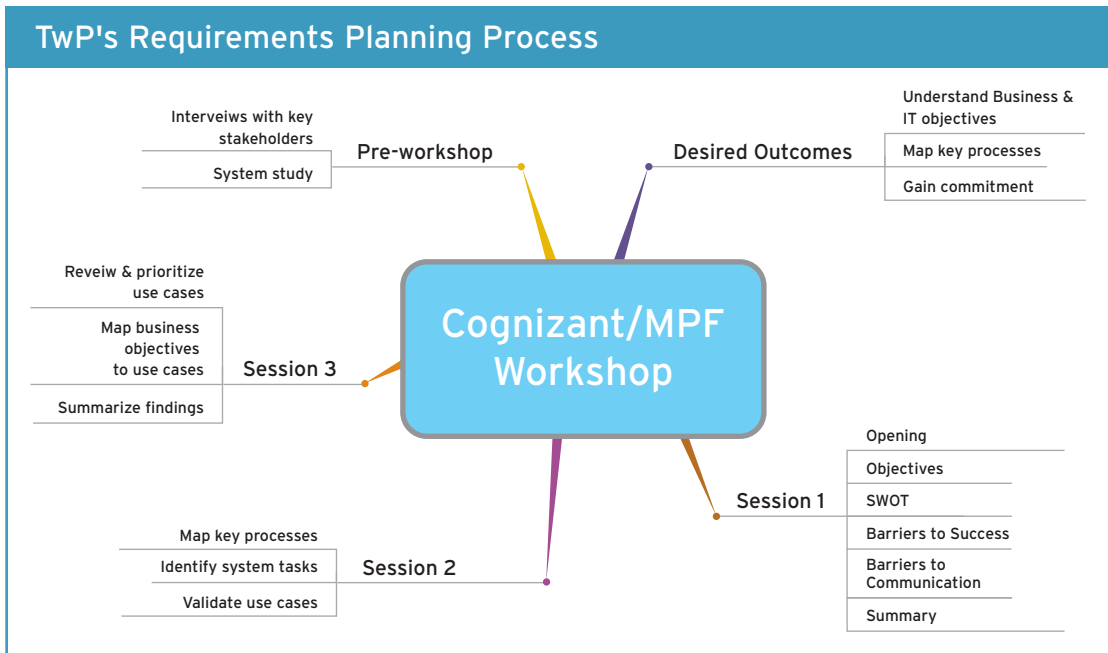
Finally, Cognizant helped Mitsubishi prioritize between the “must haves,” the “nice to haves,” and the “dreamers.” This helped the core team to understand what was key to the final FMF solution, and to reach agreement on a plan to move forward.

As the implementation of the project was underway, Mitsubishi benefited from another of Cognizant's processes, the Two-in-a-Box™ methodology for client relationship management. Under this approach Cognizant embedded senior business-IT experts with Mitsubishi's team. A Cognizant client partner worked with Mitsubishi's senior leaders to fully understand the latter's business and IT needs and communicate with developers onsite and offshore to ensure seamless delivery of the FMF solution.

The Cognizant project leader -- and Client Partner -- worked closely with a Mitsubishi project leader to ensure that concerns or questions from either side were addressed appropriately. Other Cognizant team members participating throughout the project included an offshore delivery manager, a Microsoft architect, developers and business analysts.

In addition, Cognizant brought in members from its Centers of Excellence for specialized help. For example, the company's domain consulting group provided expertise. When new, Windows-based user interface screens were developed to replace the green screens of the earlier solution, Cognizant brought in members from its usability center to help ensure that users could navigate the new solution with the minimum number of clicks per screen.

To help ensure the quality of the new solution, Cognizant even extended the length of processes where appropriate. For example, while typical integration testing runs two or three weeks, Cognizant conducted integration testing on the new FMF solution for six weeks. “This isn't just a reporting system,” explains Vijay Shrinivas, Client Partner at Cognizant for the Mitsubishi project.



A two-day, off-site workshop helped MPF see the big picture and identify potential bottlenecks before they hampered systems development.

"This solution is mission-critical to the manufacturing process. We needed to ensure the integrity of the solution with every iteration of development."

Benefits

Mitsubishi now has its .NET-based FMF solution, with levels of agility not seen before. And the company credits Cognizant with delivering the solution faster and more effectively than it thought possible.

Mitsubishi now has the flexible system it needs to continue to support customer needs quickly, even as those needs become more demanding. "Customers can come to us with last-minute changes or special needs, and our system has the flexibility to accommodate them -- and to do so without having to write special code," says Laye. "That's crucial to maintaining and enhancing customer satisfaction. This solution is essential to our business."

For example, Laye cites the ability to produce custom labels for customers -- a time-consuming, labor-intensive task before -- that the solution now handles in minutes. It's not just customer requests to which Mitsubishi can be more responsive. The reusable nature of .NET code and the high productivity of the tools available for it mean that Mitsubishi can respond more quickly to any requests for updates or enhancements from its business users. A backlog of such requests that existed under the former FMF system has been implemented and changes that formerly took weeks or months can now often be implemented within days. For example, the system can quickly respond to customer needs for various order and pricing units of measure, handle complex data requirements for Certificates of Analysis, etc.

About Cognizant

Cognizant (NASDAQ: CTSH) is a leading provider of information technology, consulting and business process outsourcing services. Cognizant's single-minded passion is to dedicate our global technology and innovation know-how, our industry expertise and worldwide resources to working together with clients to make their businesses stronger. With more than 40 global delivery centers and 58,000 employees as of March 31, 2008, we combine a unique onsite/offshore delivery model infused by a distinct culture of customer satisfaction. A member of the NASDAQ-100 Index and S&P 500 Index, Cognizant is a Forbes Global 2000 company and a member of the Fortune 1000 and is ranked among the top information technology companies in BusinessWeek's Info Tech 100, Hot Growth and Top 50 Performers listings.

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The new FMF solution from Cognizant makes it easier for Mitsubishi to maintain the system. "Cognizant helped us to move to a platform with a future, a platform for which there is a broad market of trained professionals," says Laye.

The 10-month period from design through deployment was as little as half the time that Mitsubishi expected the project might take, according to Laye. "The TwP process enabled us to proceed more quickly and effectively than we could have otherwise. We got buy-in right away from our key constituents, eliminating a time-consuming process of selling the solution internally, and eliminating the potential for missteps that could have required us to redo the initial processes."

Because Mitsubishi personnel established relationships with the Cognizant team members from the beginning, it was easy to communicate throughout the project. The people Mitsubishi met in the initial presentations were the people who implemented the project -- there was no "bait and switch" to lower-level personnel, Laye recalls.

"This was our first experience with offshore resources for a development project -- but it didn't feel like it," says Laye. "The Cognizant processes kept us fully informed, and fully engaged, throughout the development."

Mitsubishi has followed up on the success of this project by engaging Cognizant to develop an order entry/inventory system and a warehouse management system.



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