

SYNON *case study*

Enhancing BPCS with Synon/2



Wiggins Teape Appleton is one of the world's largest paper manufacturers with market leadership in the supply of carbonless paper. Their stationery division based in Romford, Essex specialises in envelope production and supplies the UK's most famous brand, Conqueror.

In terms of both their manufacture and distribution it is a complex business. The company produce over 600 standard envelopes as well as an infinite range of bespoke envelopes - the demand for which has been fuelled in recent years by the growth of direct mail. This is further complicated by the requirement to distribute to several thousand customers and outlets across the UK.

When the IT Manager Tom Gregg arrived in 1989, Wiggins Teape were using two System/36's running manufacturing and accounts packages with no in-house development. He explains 'These systems were simply not expandable. As a company, we had made the strategic commitment to IT to improve customer service, reduce stock levels and control costs.'

The need to tailor packages

Tom continues 'We needed an integrated solution that linked planning to distribution and manufacturing. In this business, customer

service is vital. People expect immediate delivery of standard envelopes. So we needed responsive, integrated and 'growable' systems.

The choice of the AS/400 platform was determined by our selection of BPCS from a review of over 30 products. It is a good stable successful product, but with any package solution, you know that not all your requirements will be met. Industry-specific items are not catered for, sales analysis are never there: reporting is not the way you would like it etc. So we accepted from the outset that we would be adding to the BPCS package.'

New to the AS/400 - with no RPG skills

But this created a problem. The AS/400 was new to the company and there was no RPG expertise on-site.

Gregg continues 'We needed a productivity tool like Synon to solve that problem. What was then our parent company, BAT, were using Synon/2. We were very impressed with both the speed and the sorts of applications they were developing.

Synon's relationship with IBM confirmed that it would be a good strategic choice so we moved quickly to acquire Synon/2 in October 1989.'

Wiggins Teape Appleton needed an integrated solution that linked planning to distribution and manufacturing.



IT Manager, Tom Gregg and Senior Analyst Programmer, Steven Williams 'we needed in-house applications to support BPCS and Synon/2 has met these objectives very well.'

The speed of learning

Before the end of the year, two of the team of 3 had completed all the education courses and written their first application.

'The courses were good' commented Steven Williams, Senior Analyst Programmer 'but the Helpline was invaluable. It is not that Synon is difficult to learn, but there is simply a lot to it. Now we have that knowledge in the department the third member of the team has picked it up very quickly and started creating new functions within a day or two. I would be far happier teaching a new person Synon than RPG!'

Meeting the needs of a small IT department

Their first project - a perpetual inventory system - proved to be an extremely good training ground. It was only a temporary system until the BPCS module could be implemented.

Steven continues 'Starting this way, allowed us to make a few mistakes in a non-critical area and I would certainly recommend a similar approach to new Synon users.'

On our first major project we also used Synon's consultancy service which was helpful in confirming that what we were doing was correct.'

Adding seamlessly to BPCS

'The next application was a sales analysis system based on the data in BPCS. This involved taking item details from BPCS and loading them into a Synon model of historical information for reporting and interrogation.'

Users don't see any immediate difference between Synon parts and BPCS parts as the breaks are transparent. Both are aiming at SAA standards - though Synon is ahead in this area. Users have been very impressed by some Synon facilities such as 'select record' and wonder why these aren't available in every part of the system they use.'

Functionally rich enhancements

'This is one of the major benefits from using Synon/2' continued Stephen Williams, 'rather than simply cut down on the time it takes to build an application you tend to add in extra functionality and improve the quality of the application for users.'

The largest application to date is an estimating system designed to provide users with accurate information for producing and tracking quotations for bespoke envelopes. It extracts actual costs, machine capacities and availability from the manufacturing files of BPCS and uses the data directly in a new Synon model which contains extra information on such things as customer details and discount codes. 'This has been quite straightforward - simply a question of putting information together.'

Operating at a higher level

Williams continues 'I enjoy working with Synon. As a former Cobol programmer it means I can operate at a much higher level rather than having to concentrate on the 'dots and commas'. I don't need to worry about the details - I can work on ideas and the real needs of the user. It's very powerful, cleverly written and remarkably bug-free. I wouldn't work without it.'

Sound strategic investment

Tom Gregg agrees with this conclusion. 'I would also rate Synon nine out of ten. It has met our objectives very well. As a small DP department we needed in-house applications to support BPCS. I argued from the outset that with the best tools we could get the best applications in the shortest possible time. Our users are happy, the team are happy and we have applications that are a good strategic base, are easily maintainable and will last for many years to come. Our investment in Synon has certainly paid off.'