



"AutoFORM: A Winning Formula for SAP Output & Document Management"

Overview

■ Challenge

To cut SAP output development times and costs. To enable document variations, including multiple languages (Asian double byte), plus legal, tax, regional identity differences.

Automated document distribution by email, fax, network.

■ Solutions

AutoFormGUI interface and point & click document design tools quickly converts SAP data into laser forms.

Email & fax distribution with XML option.

SAP interactive document imaging system, for SAP generated forms plus scanned documents. Links to SAP screens, so users only have to click on a field to see the documents they need to refer to to complete their tasks.

■ Why AutoForm?

AutoFORM provided control and significant ongoing cost advantages over SAPscript.

■ Key Business Benefits

100% payback before going live, as documents are easier to produce compared to SAPscript. Significant KPI improvements in customer services and credit control, due to the ability to immediately retrieve copies of queried documents at the desktop.

■ Is it for you?

AutoFORM aids swift and rapid deployment of output & document management strategies for all SAP modules plus other IT applications.



Anil Patel General Manager, IT Technology



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These are the words of Anil Patel, General Manager of Information Technology at BOC Edwards. Edwards have been using AutoFORM for just over a year to manage 250 document variations, in various languages and currencies. AutoFORM has also enabled intelligent automated document routing by email, fax, network and post, in addition to introducing SAP integrated onscreen document viewing.

Director Ian Hopwood added: "Finance was the acid test in many ways. The end of the half-year figures were due within a month of the go live date, which meant invoicing and accounts had to be completed to a very tight deadline. We were very nervous because usually the first month can be fraught with difficulties. The fact that there were no printing or document distribution problems at all is testimony to how incredibly useful AutoFORM is in aiding a SAP implementation.



Output & Document Management

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Challenge

Unlike many other companies Edwards took the 'big bang' rather than the 'roll out' implementation approach: simultaneously introducing five SAP customised modules to over 1000 users across 5 European countries. "SAP represents more than a new IT system: it offers us a new way of working bringing substantial operating benefits. However, for these advantages to be realised, the whole of the business needed to be able to use the system from day one. A piecemeal approach would have been worse than useless." explained Patel

But installing SAP across 5 European countries had a number of implications for the programming of their business documents. Not only did they need to print documents in different languages and currencies; a number of accounting, cultural, tax and legal variances had to be catered for. For instance in France customers expect to see the actual discount percentage, whereas other parts of Europe prefer a net and gross price. Invoicing alone required 120 variations.

Patel continued: "Some companies go live with just a basic set of documents, thinking that they can introduce language variations later. However to BOC communicating with customers in their own language is a vital customer service strategy. Furthermore, as a company with a reputation for quality products every document had to be perfect. This meant that every single number separator, every decimal point, every accent and umlaut had to be right." As Patel says: "At best errors would be disrespectful to our customers, at worse they may cause payment delays or delivery errors. Neither of which was satisfactory from a business and customer service perspective."

There's Far Less Work With AutoFORM!

While BOC could have programmed the output using SAPscript the task would have been arduous and required the services of several SAP programmers, deflecting resources away from other SAP configuration developments.

Patel explains: "We were already familiar with AutoFORM as it had been used with our old MARPICS system. When we realised that AutoFORM could also be used to map SAP data, it was really just a case of convincing our SAP programmers, that a tool that was simple to use, would also enable them to achieve everything that they would normally be able to with SAPscript.

Satesh Savant - BOC SAP programmer comments: "Although I was initially sceptical, I was extremely impressed with AutoFORM. There was absolutely nothing that we wanted to do with our documents that we couldn't achieve faster, cheaper and easier with AutoFORM. With SAPscript you have to write a line of script for every text border, and for every data mapping co-ordinate, which is tedious to say the least. AutoFORM overcomes all these difficulties with a GUI interface. Here you can apply all the design elements such as logos or even barcodes, and then simply 'drag, drop & place' SAP sample data where you want it to appear. The documents appear on screen exactly as they will be printed enabling you to proof & edit as you go. This eliminates tedious trial and error test printing. It isn't just time that is saved. By eliminating hard code programming, you dramatically cut the potential for error.

To illustrate the point, Satesh cites the success of the go live date. "Other BOC Group members who had used SAPscript rather than AutoFORM had warned us to expect a few implementation output hitches, so we waited nervously. However from day one, invoices, delivery notes, statements, in fact the whole gamut of business documents flowed from 70 printers across Europe with no problems at all. While some of this success is attributed to detailed project planning, having the right tools for the job helped us considerably."

Onscreen Document Viewing Improves Productivity

But that wasn't the end of the story. One of the other main reasons for choosing AutoFORM over other output management solutions was that it would enable Edwards to distribute documents by email and fax, as well as providing SAP integrated document viewing.

According to Patel: "It was the latter that really excited the user base. "When we asked users what they thought was the most beneficial user advantage of the SAP investment, the most applauded element was the onscreen document viewing facility. AutoFORM links images of both scanned incoming and outgoing documents to the relevant SAP screens. So if a user ever needs to refer to a document while they are working in SAP, they simply have to click on their screen to view the customers letter, the quote, the invoice and so forth. It's fantastic! You can imagine the wonders it has done for productivity."

Indeed This has resulted in one of the most dramatic KPI improvements in recent history. Credit controllers say the ability to view and quickly email copy invoices enables them to resolve credit queries within one phone call, leading to significantly reduced debtor delays.

"Do we recommend AutoFORM? Definitely!" concluded Patel.

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