



*unitop* Steel in use at COGNOR Stahlhandel GmbH

## Information with system

Due to global competition the immediate availability of information is becoming more and more important. Not big beats small, but rather fast beats slow. The example of COGNOR Stahlhandel GmbH shows how to achieve company-wide information flow. For this purpose, the company uses the fully integrated solution *unitop* Steel by GOB Software und Systeme. A particular challenge during the implementation was the integration of the locations in various central and eastern European countries.

With around 550 employees, 17 sales-, service- and processing companies in 9 countries and a turnover of approximately 600 million Euros, the COGNOR steel trading group is one of the leading central and eastern European steel trading companies.

COGNOR Stahlhandel GmbH, the largest stock-keeping steel trading company of Austria, and COGNAR TAD Metals Edelstahlhandel GmbH, specialized in trading with stainless steel for industrial uses, belong to the company group. Innovation and adaptation to increasing requirements characterize the work of the COGNOR steel trading group. Therefore, a resulting task was the changeover to integrated business software.

### 15 different ERP systems

“In 2004, 17 companies of our group worked with different ERP systems”, remembers Dr. Thomas Wiesinger, IT Manager of the COGNOR Stahlhandel group. “In the corporate headquarters, we have been using SAP (4.6C) since 1997. For this reason, a release change was necessary.” Due to the wide range of solutions, several problems arose: The reporting had to be created manually, as there

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had been a lot of different charts of accounts and stock lists. Furthermore, company-wide consistent Business Intelligence functionalities for the management had been missing. Consequently, there has been a lack of instruments, which would have made it possible to take profound operative and strategic decisions on the basis of easily accessible information about the entire group of companies. Besides the lack of transparency, insufficient standardized business processes and the inadequate exploitation of synergy potentials complicated the daily work. “We had to accept a dynamic environment. For this reason, we decided to implement a uniform solution,” reports Dr. Thomas Wiesinger. Hendrik Ohlms, GOB’s project manager adds: “The implementation was intended to accomplish several goals – greater transparency for the management and controlling, higher efficiency due to an accelerated exchange of information, standardization of business processes by homogenous methods and instruments, as well as the centralization of core functions.”

## **Key criterion investment security**

In June 2004 COGNOR Stahlhandel and FAW GmbH of the Softwarepark Hagenberg started an extensive selection project. 60 providers of standard solutions were on the so-called longlist that had to be examined closely. Company-specific criteria, such as an adequate company size of the provider, the financial health, project experience and the organisational structures, belonged to the evaluation criteria. In addition, functional and technical criteria, such as flexible software architecture and the international orientation of the application, had been involved in the evaluation. “Investment and future security had been the basic key criteria for our selection,” emphasizes Dr. Thomas Wiesinger. “We wanted to achieve maximum security to work with the application for the foreseeable future.” Of the 60 providers, 5 had been put on a shortlist – among them, solution centres from SAP and Microsoft.

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Finally, the Austrians decided in favour of the application *unitop Steel* of the provider **GOB Software & Systeme**. The integrated software solution, developed on the basis of Microsoft Dynamics NAV, covers all areas of the company – from enterprise resource planning, over to customer relationship management to financial accounting and archiving. Four key criteria had been crucial for the decision: Firstly, the investment security – among other aspects, due to Microsoft and also the further development guarantee. Secondly, the strong focus on industry solutions and **GOB's** comprehensive know-how in the steel sector. Thirdly, the opportunity of localizing all central and eastern European countries. And fourthly, the willingness for customised adjustments by **GOB**.

## **Rollouts in five countries**

After the order has been placed in March 2005, the implementation phase began in June. “We faced significant challenges”, explains Dr. Thomas Wiesinger. This applies, in particular, to the size of the project, the numerous locations, which are spread over a number of states, using different ERP systems, and the coordination between the locations. “We were able to bring in our experiences from projects of this magnitude. The creation of a company-wide integrated solution and the simplification of the business processes at the locations were the main focal points within the implementation project” explains Hendrik Ohlms. In addition, the optimisation of the controlling process, amongst others, by uniform master data, the development of a data warehouse, as well as a fast rollout at the subsidiaries abroad were core elements of the project. In the center of attention was the business process reengineering, in other words, the reorganisation of all business processes.

According to Dr. Thomas Wiesinger, the company and its business processes have been reconsidered fundamentally: “Within this framework, **GOB** has carried out all software adaptations which are

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important to us in regard to competitive advantages – the so called customizing – in a very efficient and reliable way.” The acquisition of new hardware components, for which the software producer had developed a concept, was calculable. These new acquisitions included, among others, a Dynamics NAV Server for the SQL database, a server for the Business-Intelligence application, the archiving and fax system, a Citrix Server for the connection of the locations and a SAN storage system by EMC. GOB also took over the installation on schedule and the support of the hardware components. “The implementation in Austria has played an important role in the project, as that is where the standard has been developed for the whole group”, says Hendrik Ohlms. With great success: The system of COGNOR TAD GmbH went live on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2006. Three months later, on 1<sup>st</sup> July, the system of COGNOR Stahlhandel GmbH went live. The rollout in Romania took place in the same month, and in Poland, the project started in January 2007. Croatia followed in April 2008, and finally, in May 2008, the rollout at COGNOR TAD Metals in the Czech Republic took place. The rollout at COGNOR Stahlhandel in the Czech Republic started in June 2009, and will be concluded with going live in March 2010.

## High acceptance on the part of the employees

In the meantime, COGNOR Stahlhandel has a fully-integrated solution based on *unitop* Steel. This solution comprises an online-warehouse management, a document management system with revision-safe filing, a certificate management, as well as a customer relationship management (CRM). Beyond that, the *unitop* solution covers a data warehouse, an automated EDI-connection via SAP IDOC and a uniform central management of the whole IT infrastructure. About 225 employees of the company work with GOB’s application. “The solution has been considerably accepted by the employees, because they benefit from numerous advantages for their daily business”, emphasizes Dr. Thomas Wiesinger. The



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solution has led to a “quantum leap in the process expertise of the employees.” The Management profits from an up-to-date reporting due to Business Intelligence. Thanks to the current analyses, a lot of specific process improvements can be realized, which used to be unidentified. The process efficiency had clearly improved: The number of different types of businesses could be reduced from more than 40 to 5. Also the external costs have decreased, because today 80 percent of the requirements are being fulfilled by the own IT department.

## Further results

Two modules are used intensively by COGNOR Stahlhandel: On the one hand, the module *unitop* MDE, and on the other hand, the *unitop* certificate management. Due to *unitop* MDE, COGNOR Stahlhandel is no longer in need of a separate warehouse management system, which has been used before. This means that the employees receive up-to-date information about all logistic movements. The *unitop* certificate management enables an integrated management of certificates and a more effective management of the certificate despatch. Also Dr. Thomas Wiesinger would not like to miss the industry-specific application any more. “We could have never met the current challenges with our former solution and our former partners”, assures Dr. Thomas Wiesinger. “We are able to manage the entire IT operations with the same deployment of human resources like with SAP in one country.” Andreas Wessels, General Manager of GOB sums up: “Due to the integration of *unitop* Steel, COGNOR Stahlhandel benefits from uniform information and high transparency across the group. Thanks to our many years of experience, we know that great deficiencies exist in comparable corporations and company groups, particularly in this area. With *unitop* we have created a fully integrated solution, which is utterly future-proof and investment-safe. Furthermore, the solution adapts very well to the individual requirements of COGNOR Stahlhandel.”

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## **GOB Software & Systems**

The software and systems integrator GOB has been founded in 1965 and currently employs more than 200 people. GOB is Microsoft Dynamics NAV partner since 1997 and offers comprehensive industry solutions based on Microsoft Dynamics NAV for medium-sized companies and organisations. More than 500 customers with their main focus on trading, manufacturing and logistics, companies of the steel sector as well as profit and non-profit organisations benefit from GOB's fully integrated solution concept *unitop*. Companies as Finkenholl, rff, Röhrenkontor and Unionstahl and associations as action medeor, the Auto Club Europe, Mieterverein Köln and World Vision are currently to be found on the reference list.

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