



## Instant SAP for Ready-To-Assemble (RTA) Furniture



The Mevi group specialises in the production and distribution of RTA furniture. Approximately 80% of the group's turnover is exported to over 50 different countries. Its list of customers mainly comprises retailers, the major furniture chains and mail-order companies in Belgium and abroad. The company operates two facilities: a production unit in Harelbeke and a storage and distribution centre in Pecq.

With last year's turnover exceeding 1,8 billion Belgian francs, over the last few years, the Mevi group has been situated among the most important players in its market segment. To support this fast growth and the continuous need for higher performance in the technical, commercial and administrative field, Mevi decided to convert the complete administration system to SAP in 1999.

Mevi is a rapidly growing, young and dynamic company. Together with its motivated team, consisting of some 165 employees, including 35 managers, the Chief Executive Officer Geert Viaene, continually endeavours to strengthen the company's position in the competitive market for RTA furniture. As a result of the strategic automation and computerisation of its business processes and using the principle: 'all that can be automated, will be automated,' Mevi maintains faultless support of its sales, production and administrative processes. Outsourcing all IT activities compensates for the lack of an in-house EDP-department. To handle this process efficiently, in 1999 Chris Tempels, Chief Financial Officer, engaged Hendrik Pauwels to deal with the streamlining of the complete information system on a consultancy basis.

"In the past, Mevi relied on a number of different hardware and software systems. Different departments were supported by different hardware platforms and some four unrelated software products were in use. This resulted in high maintenance costs, incompatible data and consequently an unbearable situation, especially when considering the increasingly rapid growth of the company. The transfer to an integrated ERP package could no longer be postponed," Hendrik Pauwels explains.

### Objective checklist

A shortlist of ERP-software products was drawn up on the basis of a scenario that outlined a number of company-specific situations. Mevi decided to look at six possible products. "Three suppliers soon informed us that they were not able to meet the requirements," Chris Tempels continues. "So we were left with no more than three ERP-packages. A number of key-users, the different heads of service and the project leader were asked to screen these. To be able to make an objective choice, a checklist was drawn up including all standard requirements the software had to meet. The scores were kept, the marks were totalled and SAP came out as the clear winner."

### Live in less than no time

"But that was not all. As Mevi had no in-house IT staff, we had to start looking for an appropriate implementation partner. After a careful comparison of price and quality, we chose to work with Real Software. They would guide us while installing and implementing the SAP system.

We clearly pointed out that we would not deviate from the standard software, in order to stay strictly within the limits of the planned investment and time budget," says Chris Tempels.

"Real Software could guarantee a fast take-off and we could start almost immediately after selection. The development ran in accordance with the ASAP methodology and was finished within an astonishingly short time interval.



Exactly 133 working days after the start, the modules FI, CO (with CO-PA), SD, PP and MM (with WM) went live. Moreover, in the same time frame Internet and intranet were linked into the SAP system, the key-users were trained and they passed their new knowledge to the other users."

### Excellent Support

The implementation of SAP can rightly be considered a success. Hendrik Pauwels said, "All of the key elements for the successful implementation of such a project, were available. One of them undoubtedly is the commitment and motivation of the team that handled the project in-house. Both during the selection of the software package and while implementing it, the input of the nine key-users and the four heads of service was of paramount importance. This is a rather exceptional situation, but it proved to be a smart move on the part of our management team as it moved mountains in terms of user motivation. The key-users were well aware of the fact that the existing information system would drag the company down and that knowledge increased the pressure to improve the situation as fast as possible. Moreover, the key players are extremely competent and have many years of experience in their fields, which again paved the way for seamless implementation. Of course the management also played an important role. They clearly saw the project as an investment in their company's future and created the necessary space for the project within the company. To prevent any signs of the implementation in the day-to-day operation, interim staff was assigned to enlighten the workload of the key users and heads of service, enabling the latter to free up some time for the SAP-project."

### Professional Partners

"Of course the professional guidance of the consultants and the implementation partner, were also key factors," Chris Tempels continues. "The steering group only consisted of two people: Hendrik Pauwels and myself. We were fully supported by everyone at Mevi and really had 'carte blanche'. We took all crucial decisions, ensured that everyone stayed motivated and were constantly available.

Real Software also proved to be an excellent implementation partner. The people who assisted us fitted in perfectly with the company culture and succeeded in holding together and motivating the team. Continuous dialogue between consultants and key-users enabled us to rapidly translate Mevi's needs and requirements to the SAP system.'

### Enthusiastically Received

Everyone, without exception, is extremely enthusiastic about SAP. "The implementation went very smoothly and both the advantages and the possibilities are evident," confirms Chris Tempels. "In fact the SAP implementation was the ideal audit for Mevi. In the past, when we were still working with isolated software, small mistakes could easily be concealed and communication between the different departments was rather restricted and informal, which did not really facilitate corporate control of performance. Thanks to the ERP philosophy, everyone can see how his/her input can be re-used by colleagues and they are all increasingly convinced of their own value to the total business process. This results in greater dedication and motivation among the staff. Moreover, there is an evident shift from operational functions towards more controlling tasks. That is something we have to accept as a feature on the new working process."



### A Bright Future

"In the meantime, SAP is a reality, though there are several possibilities that have not yet been activated and we do not yet have a clear idea of the enormous amount of operational and management information that SAP can deliver to us. Therefore, three enthusiastic employees will follow a specific training course to develop the necessary questionnaire programmes. The SAP knowledge of all other users will be increased through in-house and external training.

In addition, great importance will be attached to the further development of the financial control activities, maintenance and the security of data processing.

Mevi has many other plans and projects for the future. We will, for example, continuously invest in increasing SAP's added value and return on investment.

Several projects are currently being reviewed on topics such as ISO standards, data capture, electronic data transfer (EDT), e-commerce and Internet applications. There is no doubt that there are lots of so far untapped possibilities," concludes a satisfied Chris Tempels.



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