

# RS Components: Coming to the Rescue with Supersonic Shipping

Picture Credit | RS Components, Corby, United Kingdom. Used with permission.



Partner



## Company

RS Components

## Headquarters

Corby, United Kingdom

## Industry, products, and services

Retail – a wide range of mechanical, electric, electronic, and IT components, power tools, office supplies, test and measurement equipment, and other goods

## Web site

[www.rs-components.com](http://www.rs-components.com)

## SAP® solutions

SAP® ERP and SAP Customer Relationship Management applications; SAP NetWeaver® Business Warehouse and SAP NetWeaver Business Process Management components

## Partner

CompriseIT  
([www.compriseit.com](http://www.compriseit.com))



# Delivering excellent customer support – when every second counts

Imagine this scene: a machine in a factory has broken down. Workers are sitting idle. Production comes to a standstill. An intricately timed supply chain is at risk, affecting dozens of stakeholders. The maintenance engineers called to the scene have to pinpoint the faulty hose, cable, or sensor and procure a replacement – fast. This is where RS Components (RS) comes to the rescue with its intuitive ordering process and **same-day shipping**.

The number one high-service distributor of electronics and maintenance products across Europe and Asia Pacific, RS serves over 1 million customers – from small family businesses to multinational corporations. Its portfolio comprises some 550,000 products from 2,500 suppliers.

That is why the company is dedicated to simplicity in ordering. Its online shop has a powerful search engine and displays accurate availability information for every product. Quotes are generated within

seconds, and goods are mailed the same day as the order is received. All in all, more than 46,000 parcels are dispatched daily from 17 warehouses around the world.

Behind this impressive speed is an extensive IT landscape based on the SAP® ERP application. And for automating processes not supported by standardized SAP solutions, RS also deployed the SAP NetWeaver® Business Process Management (SAP NetWeaver BPM) component.

Read more 

Introduction

**Vision**

Why SAP

Implementation

Solution

Benefits

Future plans

# Taking catalog retail into the e-commerce age

RS was founded in 1937 as a garage-based vendor of spare parts for radios. Over the years, it continuously expanded its range and customer base, turning into the multichannel high-service distributor it is today. The company still publishes a print catalog – but these days, most orders are placed online.

When the company realized that its paper-based, catalog-era processes could no longer effectively support growing online operations around the globe, management decided to overhaul the IT landscape. The goal: to drive customer service and enhance collaboration with suppliers by automating and streamlining as many manual processes as possible. In 2003, the company introduced its first SAP application and has not looked back.

After automating the lion's share of its tasks, RS identified processes that were not supported by SAP applications out of the box – such as customer investment management and the determination of product lead times. However, there was some hesitation about making adjustments to standard applications due to the difficulty of upgrading customized software. “Instead of modifying the back end, we decided to build on top of our existing applications,” explains Graham Wiffen, global SAP delivery manager at RS. This is why he and his team set out to find a tool for modeling these unique processes.



# 60

Country-specific  
online shops



Introduction

Vision

**Why SAP**

Implementation

Solution

Benefits

Future plans

# Integration across the IT landscape

RS has a strong IT backbone comprising SAP ERP, the SAP Customer Relationship Management (SAP CRM) application, and the SAP NetWeaver Business Warehouse (SAP NetWeaver BW) component. It was crucial that the new tool would enable integration with this extensive landscape. “We wanted to fully benefit from our existing resources and processes. So the new software had to accommodate service-oriented architecture (SOA) principles and enable integration across multiple systems,” explains Wiffen.

A further factor in the decision-making process was the planned move to the latest versions of SAP ERP and SAP CRM. “We did not want to wait for the new releases to be implemented before rolling out the new tool – so ensuring compatibility with older versions of these two applications was key,” says Wiffen.

In addition, Wiffen and his team wished to overhaul the development process itself. High up on the wish list was improving communication and collaboration with the business side. “The traditional method for application development has a lot of room for misunderstanding,” comments Wiffen. He wanted to involve the user departments from the very beginning – without overwhelming them with code or overly technical aspects.

Decision makers at RS considered a variety of composition environments, but only one ticked all the boxes when it came to building on top of SAP software: SAP NetWeaver BPM.

---

“In SAP NetWeaver BPM, we saw an opportunity to completely redesign the way we develop processes.”

Graham Wiffen, Global SAP Delivery Manager, RS Components



Introduction

Vision

Why SAP

**Implementation**

Solution

Benefits

Future plans

## Excellent teamwork

For the implementation of SAP NetWeaver BPM, RS teamed up with CompriseIT. “We chose to work with the people at CompriseIT because of their proven track record with SAP NetWeaver BPM. They’d been there and done exactly what we wished to achieve,” explains Wiffen. The SAP partner’s open standards – minimizing the risk of partner lock-in – and dedication to agile development practices sealed the deal.

The team decided to start out small, with just one process: customer investment (discount) management. The implementation of SAP NetWeaver BPM, plus the development of this first application, took just four months. “We gave the implementation partner a concrete list of processes we wanted to support. This greatly expedited the implementation process,” says Wiffen.

CompriseIT deployed agile development methods for this undertaking. For example, functionality for the first process automated with the tool was rolled out in stages. User departments were able to start using the new application and delivering feedback from the very beginning – ensuring a perfect fit.

After successfully leveraging SAP NetWeaver BPM for this initial project, RS deployed it for automating additional manual processes. During the first 12 months the component was live, a total of four solutions were put into production.

---

“The licensing costs were offset with the very first project. Everything we achieved after that point was pure value added.”

Graham Wiffen, Global SAP Delivery Manager, RS Components



Introduction

Vision

Why SAP

Implementation

**Solution**

Benefits

Future plans

# A powerful engine for process automation

SAP NetWeaver BPM enables RS to develop solutions for processes not supported by standard SAP software. Its shared environment allows users from the business side and IT side to collaboratively design, model, and execute new or adapted business processes on the basis of a single, directly executable process model and standards-based tools.

RS's first project using the tool, the development of a customer investment application for managing customer discounts, involved automation of a manual process. This activity, previously carried out with Oracle software and Microsoft SharePoint, lacked integration with the overall IT landscape. The new fully automated process draws data from SAP ERP, SAP CRM, and SAP NetWeaver BW. The application also incorporates rules that were drafted by the business side using the shared development environment.

Another application created using SAP NetWeaver BPM is a supply chain collaboration tool. Lead-time updates from suppliers used to be input manually into a change request form, which was then processed through a number of Microsoft Excel macros before entry into SAP applications. Today, suppliers update lead times via electronic data interchange (EDI) or by uploading Excel files via an extranet portal. After being filtered through a rules engine, the lead times are automatically input into the relevant systems.

In addition, RS has found SAP NetWeaver BPM to be a valuable application development environment for small-scale tools and widgets. For example, Wiffen and team used it to create more intuitive UIs for a number of solutions and an interface for a division not yet leveraging SAP software.



Introduction

Vision

Why SAP

Implementation

Solution

**Benefits**

Future plans

# Taking business and IT alignment to the next level

SAP NetWeaver BPM adds a new dimension to how RS adapts its SAP software – and has helped communications between the business and IT. “We interact with our customers in a different way. We can now find out exactly what the business wants to achieve, far quicker than before,” comments a satisfied Wiffen.

The tool has changed how the SAP team interact with the business. “We used to be viewed as a service provider. Now, we are a partner,” says Wiffen. The IT and business side now work hand in hand in developing functionality. This ensures greater understanding and eliminates expensive and time-consuming redesigns.

Thanks to agile development processes and SOA principles, time to value has been slashed. “Getting from the requirements-gathering stage to going live used to take months, if not years. Now, we can roll out initial functionality within weeks,” explains Wiffen. “And as users can now test-drive the application early on, there are no unpleasant surprises.”

The solutions developed with the help of SAP NetWeaver BPM have also contributed to RS’s achievement of its business goals: boosting customer satisfaction and enhancing collaboration with suppliers. For example, the customer investment management tool ensures prompt contract generation. And thanks to the new supply chain collaboration process, the online shop always displays the most up-to-date information on lead times – crucial benefits for customers who need their products fast.

---

“SAP NetWeaver BPM has helped to change the perception of the IT department within the company. We used to have to say ‘no’ to many requests from the business side, but now we can say ‘yes.’”

Graham Wiffen, Global SAP Delivery Manager, RS Components





Introduction

Vision

Why SAP

Implementation

Solution

Benefits

**Future plans**

# The quest for greater automation

Wiffen and his colleagues are always on the lookout for processes to model with SAP NetWeaver BPM. “When we have a need for business process change, or development that goes beyond our SAP standard solutions, we always consider using SAP NetWeaver BPM.” Wiffen remarks.

In addition, RS is planning on reusing elements of solutions designed with SAP NetWeaver BPM in line with SOA principles. An example is the modified version of the supplier collaboration solution for small vendors with Excel instead of EDI.

Wiffen is also using open application programming interfaces within SAP NetWeaver BPM to make software accessible on mobile devices. Initial applications of this sort have already been rolled out, and more are in the pipeline. This enables staff to leverage software while on the road – boosting productivity and creating even more value for the company.

