



SAP®  
Public Sector

The University of Fribourg, which has found fame beyond the Swiss border particularly for its theology, law and science departments, is also characterized by its French-German bilingualism - a good example of cultural cohabitation at the center of Europe. In 1996 the University had approximately 8,600 students (of which 16% were foreign), 160 professors and 350 lecturers. Its five faculties run more than 200 projects financed by Switzerland's national fund for scientific research and third parties. It has signed thirty international conventions and takes part in all major European university programs.



SAPHIR Consulting

## UNIVERSITY OF FRIBOURG



### Financial management within the academic environment

Keeping the books for the University of Fribourg is no easy task – there are a large number of funds to administer, and the state-sponsored institution does not have total control over all of its resources and expenditures. The previous IT solution, which was enhanced many a time to take account of these aspects, was no longer satisfactory. Within a project involving all the users concerned and spearheaded by a team of three persons, the choice for a replacement solution went to SAP's R/3 System, which was implemented in record time. Today the finance section of the administration departments at the University of Fribourg has a modern business tool that enables it to effectively master the many tasks that fall within its responsibility.

Due to the intertwining of university funds with those from the canton, accounting has become a real headache. Furthermore, administering the funds granted for the many research projects generates a very large volume of work. The old tool had not been designed for the needs of such administrative work. A variety of applications had also been developed on a PC and Macintosh, each

one gradually becoming an individual management system. Apart from the inefficiency caused by multiple entry and the lack of consistency, this situation destroyed any chance for a global view. Moreover, the system did not allow for the electronic transfer of data to financial establishments and was not ergonomic.

### The project takes shape

For all these reasons the implementation of a new system had been on the cards for a few years. In January 1995, a working group got down to the job in hand. The masterminds behind this project: Gérard Python, head of the finance department, and Jean-Pierre Gauch, who was in charge of administrative IT. An initial invitation to tender and visits to potential suppliers enabled them to obtain an idea of what solutions existed and to draw up a budget, which was given the green light in May.

***“For an accountant, it’s an experience not to be missed.”***



## A solution involving all users

From the beginning, all persons affected by the new software were involved in the analysis and decision-making process. "It was important that each user appreciated the importance of this project and felt to be a part of it. Imposing a solution which they themselves had not chosen would have been out of the question," said Jean-Pierre Gauch.

***"If you know where you are going, there won't a problem"***

During the second semester of 1995 a detailed analysis of the information flow was carried out to establish the service specifications sent to potential vendors. From the beginning the situation was clear, "We were ready for a complete overhaul, to start from scratch and organize our work differently," Gérard Python stated. Scenarios were devised to make the product demonstrations more realistic and the vendors were requested to fill out, in detail, a questionnaire aimed at evaluating their offer.

## Standardizing the platforms

Some general criteria contained in the specifications were: client/server architecture, graphical user interface, DOS client and Macintosh, multilingualism, product life cycle, ease of interfacing and decentralized printing. The system had to correspond to the specific needs of an administration. It had to allow the data to be analyzed in-depth, transferred to a spreadsheet and to authorize, for example, the calculation of interest on all the accounts.

Lists of similar criteria were drawn up for all areas: creditors, debtors, invoicing, stockkeeping, and so on. The six potential vendors rapidly went down to two, and in June 1996 the decision was taken to purchase the SAP R/3 software. All this analysis and selection work was done by the staff of the university's administration departments, without any external assistance.

## Troika on the spot

To implement the application, however, the services of an external consultant became inevitable. In the end, Saphir Consulting, a local services company

specializing in introducing the SAP tool, was selected. Its director, Roger Fragnière, quickly became the third driving force behind the convoy, and this synergy of three strong and complementary personalities was certainly the main factor behind the success of the project.

***"It was important that each user appreciated the importance of this project and felt to be a part of it."***

## High-speed implementation

When the decision was taken, there were only about six months left to get the system going — no small feat given the size of the project. The servers were only installed in October, but it was absolutely necessary for the system to be up and running at the beginning of 1997. It would have been unthinkable to put everything back by a whole year or to go over to a new system when the fiscal year was already underway. It was also out of the question to write a single line of code: it is through customizing that the R/3 product accommodates the users' specifications. "It is quite an experience managing a project of this scale and creating tools to fulfill users' requirements," Jean-Pierre Gauch said. Gérard Python stated, "For an accountant, it's an experience not to be missed. It gave me a better understanding of everything involved, the input and output of the financial sector." However, not everything went smoothly. For reasons beyond their control, the computer connection to the SAP support service could not be set up in time. The protagonists said, "You would have to refuse to take on such a job if you didn't have this resource beforehand."

***"It is quite an experience managing a project of this scale and creating tools to fulfill users' requirements!"***

On January 27, 1997, with the 1996 fiscal year already closed, the Financial Accounting (FI), Sales and Distribution (SD), Materials Management (MM), Treasury (TR) and Funds Management (FM) modules could begin operation.

## Debtors like the invoices

Scarcely three months later, the new system had already become a feature of everyday life and was operating free of any significant problems. The bur-sar responsible for the distribution of equipment and consumables saw his efficiency soar. In this department invoicing used to take weeks, but now only takes a matter of hours. Even debtors commented on the quality of the new invoices.

In the financial department, the increase in workload was significant even after implementation, particularly for training the users. Implementing R/3 changed the working practices of the persons concerned. However, from the beginning it became considerably more simple to control the operating credits and budgets. All the information is now stored in a single location and is immediately available. Double entry is now a thing of the past and security has clearly been improved.

## Opening

Now the system has to be made available to other institutions which will then be able to check their accounts themselves. Another task to be carried out: to integrate the areas of accounting jointly managed with the state.

With regard to difficulties in implementing R/3, Jean-Pierre Gauch is to the point, "If you know where you are going, there won't be a problem; however, you must not be afraid of changing how you work." Gérard Python for his part is not short of advice for potential candidates, "You have limit yourself. If you remove everything that is redundant for the matter in hand, usage becomes simple. It is really the quality of the analysis which primarily determines the success of such a project."

## Technical Information

- R/3 Modules
  - Financial Accounting (FI)
  - Treasury (TR)
  - Funds Management (FM)
  - Sales and Distribution (SD)
  - Materials Management (MM)
- Server
  - 2 Digital Alpha servers with Windows NT

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