SOA PEOPLE
Inspire Performance

Bleckmann
Fashion & Lifestyle Logistics

Investment in SAP ERP demonstrates Bleckmann's professional credentials and prepares them for growth

ABOUT THE CLIENT

Bleckmann is a European market leader providing Global Supply Chain Solutions (SCM) for the Fashion and Lifestyle industry. Based in Belgium and the Netherlands, with a new facility in the UK, Bleckmann distribute 300 million apparel units per year. They employ 1500 people, have an annual revenue of €200+ million and their clients include the big names in fashion.

Bleckmann's network infrastructure is the most complete and extensive of its kind in Western Europe. Operating on a hub and spoke distribution network within countries, it can handle both hanging and boxed merchandise. One of their strategic aims is to grow and become a "Best-in-Class" leading global supply chain company.

HIGHLIGHTS

- A more productive back office – high performance and more efficient

- Professional SAP system demonstrates Bleckmann's business credentials to customers

- Standardisation achieved across a growing business, with more efficient processes

- A complex, innovative project that achieved its aims, delivered on time and budget

- A platform for further improvement and growth

CHALLENGE

Bleckmann was formed by the merger of TNT Fashion in The Netherlands and Belspeed in Belgium in 2014. Both companies had solid market positions and occupied distinct niches in the fashion and lifestyle market place. With the merger came a rebranding exercise and the birth of Bleckmann, along with significant activity to integrate the two companies and bring their internal framework up to a level to meet Bleckmann's ambitious growth targets.

Johan Milliau, CEO of Bleckmann explains; *"We were merging the two companies and at the same time building a new organisation in the UK. One of the companies we had acquired was very structured and KPI driven company whereas the other company is a fast moving entrepreneurial environment. To integrate them we decided to invest in a new financial and reporting system, implemented over a 12 month timeline."*

The scale, complexity and significant impact on the workforce meant that Bleckmann needed a very robust and professional solution implemented by a partner who understood their business and the challenges.

"We investigated potential systems and partners for implementation, and we finally chose a modern version of SAP as the best solution for us, with SOA People as our implementation partner."

SOLUTION

Scope

Bleckmann needed a robust foundation on which to grow their business. Their objectives for this project were:

- To harmonise the processes relating to accounting, control and purchase.
- To optimise reporting by setting up a structure in the ERP system aligned with the business specifics, and clearly defining what reports were generated from SAP.
- To review and optimise existing processes and structures, regardless of the constraints of the previous platforms.
- To develop an environment with standardised processes and systems, forming a strong platform for further international expansion and digital transformation.

"Six years ago when we got into the logistics business we bought a €20 million company, now it's €200 million and we want to grow to €500 million. Based on this ambitious growth path we need our reporting, accounting and purchasing to be aligned, so that we have the internal framework to cope with the challenges of the next 3-5 years," explains Milliau.

Bleckmann set up an in-house project team to link with SOA People during the implementation, with a dedicated external Project Manager to ensure the project ran to its strict budget and timeline. An essential part of the SAP ERP implementation was full integration with Bleckmann's complex and specialised logistics, warehousing and transport systems.

"Each year we make 1 billion moves. We have millions of data coming out of our warehouse management and transport systems and they are generating invoices. It was very important that the systems could talk to each other," says Milliau.

Project Governance

A central element of this project was strong project governance in combination with a focus on stakeholder engagement. The project governance structure creates different behaviour and the stakeholder engagement supports the change.

"Early on in the project I realised there were difficulties implementing the changes, so we had a meeting to gear up the change management. From that moment I stepped into the Project Team, to be visually involved, which was agenda wise difficult at times because I'm the CEO, but it was important," explains Milliau.

Good communication at all levels was essential to build trust and buy-in. Over the course of the project SOA People engaged with Bleckmann staff to understand the business needs at all levels and then they trained staff in how to get the most out of the SAP system. Understanding how organisational structures and processes can be streamlined with SAP to enhance efficiency was crucial to the project, and this is a key strength of SOA People.

The project went live as planned on 1 January 2016, which represents a turnaround time of 44 weeks to go-live for a complex SAP landscape.

"I was very happy in January 2016 when I had my first Board Meeting and I could say "we ended the implementation on time and within approved budget". They thought I was joking," says Milliau.

"At the start, I didn't have SAP in mind. I knew SAP was very professional and a good system but I thought it would be too big for us and very hard to implement. In reality it has proved otherwise."

Future enhancements

Now that the system is up and running SOA People and Bleckmann plan to continue working together to further inspire performance and improve efficiencies.

BENEFITS

A more productive back office. SAP ERP has brought significant efficiencies to Bleckmann. Reduced administration, with fewer manual actions and corrections means a faster turn-around.

Professional system. *"We work for big names in fashion and retail – Champions League companies. They want suppliers and partners who are also professional. A SAP backbone gives a professional flavour to what we do, and we know we can get SAP support anywhere in the world as we expand,"* says Milliau.

Standardisation across a growing business, plus more efficient processes. There are now standardised processes for Bleckmann Belgium and NL – the *"Bleckmann core model".* During the implementation business processes and responsibilities were reviewed. For example, in Holland there were sometimes six stages to approve a purchase order, and now it is two.

A complex project which achieved its aims, on time and in budget. Implementing SAP ERP as two companies were merging and another was being set up was very challenging. The commitment of staff at all levels from across both Bleckmann and SOA People ensured the project delivered its objectives against the odds, on time and in budget.

A platform for further improvement and growth. Bleckmann has an ambitious plan for growth and expansion across the world. In order to do this they need world class systems and SOA People have delivered the robust and professional SAP ERP platform that Bleckmann needs.

SUMMARY

"This was an important and major investment for us, but now I have a more productive back office than before. In the coming years we can change the dashboards, and start building to meet to our own needs. I feel comfortable for the coming decade," concludes Milliau.