

HOW A NEW ZEALAND GAS OPERATOR REVAMPED THEIR IT. IN RECORD TIME

USE CASE

Supplying natural gas to tens of thousands of industrial, commercial and residential customers across the North Island is no small undertaking. In fact, for one operator, its extensive network of high-pressure gas transmission and distribution pipes makes it one of the largest in New Zealand and that comes with various challenges.

Operating in a highly-regulated industry means needing to remain compliant. After several acquisitions and a major re-branding exercise, the decision was taken by this operator to “start with a clean sheet” and create better efficiencies by upgrading its outdated IT systems.

The priority was to find a system that was more affordable and less complex to replace the ageing and highly expensive SAP system they had inherited.

They urgently needed to find a robust asset management system that would suit the company’s complex needs and be as agile as its people. Adding to the issue was a drop-dead date of the end of August for the switch-over to the new IT infrastructure and by this stage, it was already April.

This would have most IT directors running for the hills, but this gas distribution company was determined to be different. They placed an emphasis on incorporating the agility of a start-up into how they worked so they could rapidly adapt when necessary to take advantage of new opportunities. In the case of a new IT system, this was the perfect time to strip back the outdated structures and run with more freedom to pivot to be more responsive to customer needs.



PROJECT: How a New Zealand gas operator revamped their IT in record time.

TECHNOLOGY: Maximo

INDUSTRY: Utilities



Out with the old, in with Maximo

Certus was selected to lead the implementation of IBM Maximo, which would be at the centre of the new IT infrastructure, due to its core competencies around asset management in the energy and utilities sector.

With a highly experienced, but also ageing workforce with an average age of 55, many of the distributor's technicians refused to even login to the SAP system. Any maintenance or inventory system changes therefore needed to be managed in consultation with the technical team, who would be the ones using it, so they were involved from the project's inception.

The decision to shift to Maximo was made because it is a comprehensive solution for managing physical assets on a common platform with built-in mobile access, mapping, crew management and analytical insight.

Maximo allows organisations to share and enforce best practices, inventory, resources and personnel and it also helps manage all types of assets – including production, infrastructure, facilities and communications.

To enable technicians in the field to update Maximo remotely, the company replaced its former Datacom mobile solution from SAP with Certus Mobile and this went live in November 2016.

In order to stick to its philosophy of customer centricity, the company took the decision to replace SAP's Siebel Customer Relationship Management (CRM) with Dynamics CRM and its SAP financials system were replaced with Dynamics NAV, which Certus also integrated with Maximo.

The transition project's mantra was "What we did yesterday, we do tomorrow." Meaning that they wanted to ensure the processes its technicians did daily and were familiar with, were replicated in the new system. The only difference would be the removal of any paper-based processes.

Business benefits

Despite the quick turnaround needed, the new IT infrastructure with IBM Maximo at its centre was delivered in the three-month timeframe and immediately put to work.

With enhanced systems driving its operations, the company has been able to increase its focus on being customer-centric. It can now quickly respond to its customer base and meet high expectations thanks to greater flexibility with processes.

The technicians aren't just using the system now; they've started suggesting improvements, and are showing a strong drive to want to use it to assist with and report on their day-to-day tasks because of its simplicity.

By having these workers input their vast knowledge into the systems, the potential issue of a knowledge gap arising as older workers retire and younger technicians join the company has been significantly decreased. As the older technicians continue using the systems, more and more important information will be in there for future workers.

One of the major benefits of the overhaul is that the company is now able to use Maximo's robust asset management capabilities to prove the rationale behind any potential price changes it must run past the regulator. If extra investment is required for efficient and safe transmission and distribution of gas to customers, the information from Maximo will outline why this is the case. Most importantly, this enables it to remain competitive and profitable in a highly price-sensitive market.

Benefits

- A greater focus on customer centricity with more flexible systems.
- Buy-in from technicians to use the system which ensures their vast knowledge is loaded in and able to be accessed by future workers.
- Able to more comprehensively prove the reasoning behind price changes with greater visibility across assets..

