Dunelm

Dunelm, the UK's #1 homewares retailer, employed automation software from Basis Technologies to accelerate delivery of innovation, reduce SAP production incidents and increase control of their SAP systems.

ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

Founded in 1979, Dunelm is the UK's #1 homewares retailer. With over 170 bricks-and-mortar stores and a growing online presence, Dunelm offers over 30,000 product lines and supports more than 3.5 million customer visits each week. In 2018 the company's annual revenue increased to more than £1bil (approx $1.3bil).

The Challenge

Dunelm's SAP systems were perceived internally as limiting competitiveness due to frequent incidents in production systems and an inability to quickly deliver innovation to the business. In order to address these issues Dunelm's SAP team had to contend with a highly customized landscape, complex multi-track development, multiple external development teams and a historical lack of governance.

About Dunelm's SAP landscape

Dunelm's SAP landscape consists of a combination of cloud-hosted and on-premise R/3 systems. ECC, EWM and BW modules are in use, with a five-system development for each consisting of sandbox, dev, QA, pre-prod and production. Multiple parallel development projects are typically in flight, particularly in their ECC system.

The Solution

Dunelm selected ActiveControl from Basis Technologies to support an SAP transformation project and future change management processes. ActiveControl has delivered a "vast" improvement in the governance of SAP change processes, along with a corresponding increase in development quality and a more agile, flexible delivery of innovation that can support Dunelm's continued growth.

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SAP at Dunelm

Dunelm has employed SAP software for more than 12 years but during that time their systems had become difficult to maintain due to a high level of customization, a historical reliance on external development resources and an overall lack of governance and control. The challenge was compounded by a complex multi-track development environment in which a number of different teams work independently on concurrent projects.

As a result, the business was frequently disrupted by major production incidents, delivery of innovation was delayed and Dunelm's SAP team was under increasing pressure to better support the company's growth by delivering SAP projects to the business more quickly and safely. A redesign of their SAP change and release process, including the introduction of automation for the first time, was seen as key part of the response to this challenge. ActiveControl from Basis Technologies was the chosen automation solution.

Landscape alignment and moving to the cloud

As they embarked on transformation of their landscape Dunelm's SAP team took the decision to do more than just overhaul their change control processes. A complex SAP landscape alignment project was also instigated by Dunelm's SAP Technical Services Manager, Steve Ross.

The landscape alignment involved migration of all non-production SAP systems to Amazon Web Services (AWS) for more standardization, greater flexibility and a reduction in maintenance costs. It was therefore critical that the chosen change automation solution could be implemented within the project timeline, a test which ActiveControl passed with flying colors. "There were very finite timelines that we were working to," Steve Ross points out. "So we couldn't have something that was going to take us a long time to configure and implement."

Pain Points

- ▶ Too many major production incidents
- ▶ Slow delivery of change
- ▶ Frequent overtakes and conflicts due to concurrent development projects
- ▶ Difficult in managing quality of external development
- ▶ Inefficient change management processes, with too much manual effort
- ▶ Frequent issues caused by use of spreadsheets to manage complex dependencies

Outcomes & Benefits

- ▶ Significant decrease in Major Production Incidents (with landscape alignment project)
- ▶ Faster delivery of SAP change
- ▶ Conflicts, overwrites and dependency issues virtually eliminated
- ▶ Significant reduction in manual effort
- ▶ Enforcement of governance policies and standards, including roles and permissions
- ▶ Single source of truth minimizes audit effort

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The implementation was staged to meet Dunelm's project requirements, with the first phase up and running in only 2 weeks. The Dunelm team were able to start using the tool immediately thanks to its ability to automate delivery of change across any combination of on-premise and cloud systems.

Governance, control and quality

ActiveControl's powerful automation features have enabled Dunelm to significantly improve the quality of their SAP development, contributing to a dramatic reduction in major production incidents in just a few months. Its advanced analyzers can automatically enforce more than sixty risk, quality and impact checks, ensuring that changes cannot be moved out of a system (whether dev, QA or pre-prod) until they're truly ready.

In addition, ActiveControl automatically manages both object dependencies and deployment sequencing. This has enabled Dunelm to further increase quality and accelerate change in their ECC landscape by eliminating the use of spreadsheets — a slow and error-prone way of working — from the SAP release management process. Changes can now progress automatically through Dunelm's ECC landscape but will do so only when they should, with everything they need to work correctly.

ActiveControl's approval system also supports the new governance policies that have been put in place at Dunelm to decrease risk to SAP production systems. Users of the tool can be assigned different functional permissions to ensure that only those with an appropriate level of authority can approve a change, a decision typically based on the output of ActiveControl's automated analyzers.

"There is a lot of stuff you can switch on in ActiveControl, like the code inspectors, that give you more governance and more control. It's excellent. It gives you much more confidence in the quality of the developments that you're pushing into your QA systems and their readiness for testing," explains Ross.

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Multiple projects and teams

Though Dunelm's in-house SAP team has grown in response to the challenges they face, it remains relatively small. That means there is a still a heavy reliance on external development resources who may be in different locations or even working for different vendors — a significant challenge in a shared development environment like SAP.

ActiveControl provides Dunelm with a means to solve this problem by dynamically monitoring and managing change across multiple project development systems, automatically merging code where no conflicts are detected and flagging up such conflicts when they do occur. What's more, its role as a single source of truth that must be used by all parties significantly enhances visibility and collaboration across the board.

"Easier identification of conflicts, that's a big thing for us," notes Ross. "Certainly in the test environments where we had lots of issues with projects sitting waiting on other projects … That's been eliminated completely."

Looking to the future

Much progress has been made but Dunelm's mission to enhance their SAP systems will not stop with a new release management process. "Dunelm as an IT organization is going through a big organization change and moving towards a more DevOps-type culture," says Steve Ross. "All the project teams are using JIRA [an agile development planning tool], so we have to be looking at what we can do in terms of helping them along that path. One thing we're doing just now is integrating with ServiceNow"

ActiveControl provides a platform that will support Dunelm as they adopt new approaches like DevOps within their SAP environment, offering numerous out-of-the-box integrations with tools like JIRA, ServiceNow, GitLab and Azure DevOps. It gives them the means to ensure that SAP becomes increasingly closely integrated with other IT functions as teams move to a more cross-functional model.

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Conclusion

As a core element in Dunelm's SAP transformation project, ActiveControl has delivered a "vast" improvement in the governance of their SAP change processes, along with a corresponding increase in development quality.

That means fewer interruptions to the business caused by issues in SAP production systems and a more agile, flexible delivery of innovation that can support Dunelm's continued growth. Steve Ross takes the final word: "Basis Technologies are a trusted partner to help us with this DevOps journey, and ActiveControl is a key component of that."

About ActiveControl

ActiveControl from Basis Technologies automates the end-to-end SAP change and release process to massively reduce manual effort and protect systems from downtime. Built specifically for SAP, it delivers a fundamentally new approach that enables companies to adopt agile development, DevOps and Continuous Delivery in SAP environments.

ActiveControl can transform the way you run SAP. Visit our website to find out more and request a free demo.

www.basistechnologies.com

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