CBHGROUP

CBH Group wanted to accelerate delivery of SAP change, while reducing post-deployment issues in production. They chose software from Basis Technologies to help them achieve these goals as they plan for an agile future.

ABOUT THE CUSTOMER

Established in Western Australia in 1933, CBH Group is Australia's largest co-operative and a leader in the Australian grain industry. Owned and controlled by around 4,000 grain growers and headquartered in Perth, Western Australia, CBH is Australia's largest exporter of grain, with a market share of approximately 30% of aggregated bulk exports.

The Challenge

Regular issues were impacting business users of CBH's SAP systems. A manual change management process based on email and spreadsheets limited the pace of change and lacked the visibility needed for an effective Change Approval Board (CAB) or management of an external service provider. A plan to adopt agile development increased the pressure for a new way of working.

About CBH's SAP landscape

CBH's SAP landscape centers around an on-premise ECC implementation that includes two Development clients plus QA, Pre-production and Production systems, with BAU and all but the most major project development occurring in a single track. Other applications such as B/W, BOBJ and GRC are also in use, along with cloud-based tools like SuccessFactors and Concur.

The Solution

CBH selected ActiveControl from Basis Technologies to transform their management of SAP change. It has enabled them to increase the pace of delivery, reduce production issues and provide a far greater level of governance and visibility. Thanks to ActiveControl, at CBH SAP code rework 'doesn't exist anymore, we don't have that in our production environment, it's not an issue … it's dropped from 4 FTE days per month to zero'.

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> "The two biggest benefits we've got out of ActiveControl are rapid deployment and governance, particularly where different developments are racing to get to production. You've got to have something like it for an SAP implementation like ours. With our external support provider and our focus on driving down IT costs we couldn't do it any other way. We could not use Excel spreadsheets and email on an SAP implementation of our size."
>
> Phil Ridley, Senior Applications SME, CBH

SAP at CBH

CBH, Australia's largest grain exporter, employs a comprehensive and well-established SAP landscape centered around ECC to support the needs of an organization that spans a large proportion of Western Australia and select sites in Southeast Asia. In particular, the distributed and highly seasonal nature of CBH's business has resulted in a dynamic and complex HR environment where extremely frequent, often interdependent, changes are required - an especially difficult task with just a single path to production. A lean internal SAP team faced many of the challenges commonly experienced in such a scenario (effective dependency management, for example).

To address these challenges and improve the service they were able to provide to the business, CBH's SAP team took advantage of a company-wide initiative to centralize and standardize IT tooling. They began the search for a product that would enable them to increase the speed of SAP change and reduce the risk of production issues that might disrupt daily business. ActiveControl from Basis Technologies was the chosen automation solution.

Move fast; don't break things

CBH were deploying SAP change on a weekly basis but felt they were not able to get innovation from development to production fast enough. Reducing these 'cycle times' was a key goal in their adoption of change automation. Manual methods - in particular, the usual extensive use of Excel spreadsheets - meant the team had no effective way to identify code issues and conflicts prior to testing in the QA environment. Thus rounds of rework were often required, delaying delivery as developers iterated towards a solution.

To complicate matters, an external service provider also provided basis and development support. Without a central view of work in progress it was hard for CBH to ensure that transports being created and deployed by the external team would not conflict with internal development work.

Pain Points

- Slow delivery of SAP change
- Excessive manual effort and rework
- Too many production issues in SAP systems
- CAB unable to make informed 'good decisions'
- No way to manage dependencies effectively
- Lack of coordination/visibility between teams

Outcomes & Benefits

- Safe delivery of SAP change in <1 day
- Code rework virtually eliminated (4 FTE days/month to zero)
- Fewer production errors; increase in user confidence
- Centralized view of change gives CAB comfort and confidence
- Automated analysis of concurrent development exposes all issues before deployment
- Complete visibility of development progress

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The high level of automation provided by ActiveControl has enabled CBH to take control of this process and reduce their dependence on external resources, even with a small internal team. "ActiveControl gives us the ability to release and move transports internally in a measured way without having to leverage external support," notes Phil Ridley, Senior Applications SME at CBH. "We [now] only reach out to our [external] provider at the regression test and production stages." Creation of each transport request previously took two hours but is now virtually instantaneous, while over sixty out-of-the-box analyzers can identify a wide range of issues before code even leaves the development system. Rework has been virtually eliminated, saving more than two full months of effort each year.

When testing and validation in QA are required before development can be signed off, ActiveControl's Transport of Copies (ToC) function dramatically speeds things up by reducing the number of transports that need to be deployed into QA and beyond. At CBH code can now move from Dev to QA for testing in a five minute cycle and critical changes can be delivered safely to production within a day if necessary, without compromising on governance or quality. "The Transport of Copies function means we can prototype something and move it to QA very quickly without keeping track of a very long list of transports. We cannot live without it," says Phil Ridley.

Governance and visibility

Despite the weekly deployment cadence prior to installation of ActiveControl, a process based on email and spreadsheets meant that SAP could not be effectively integrated into the regular CAB, or provide the board with confidence that all necessary testing was executed and passed before changes were deployed. As such, CBH wanted greater control and oversight of SAP change to help them reduce overly-frequent production issues.

Dependency management was a particular challenge in a single track environment with large amounts of concurrent BAU and project development. As many different changes progressed simultaneously towards production it was difficult for the CAB to understand whether code was being promoted too soon, or if everything needed was moving at the same time.

ActiveControl has dramatically changed this situation by providing a centralized view that contains complete information about the progress and status of every SAP change, including the tests that have been run and the associated results.

"Where something moves in the market and you need to respond quickly to it, we have the ability to push something through safely in a day to support a particular business process. That's not a problem with ActiveControl," explains Phil Ridley.

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The governance, control and visibility provided by ActiveControl mean it's now easy for the CAB to see exactly where every piece of development has got to, when it is likely to be delivered, and whether it should be approved for deployment to production. Built-in analyzers automatically run deep dependency checks and the ToC function once again comes into its own by reducing 'noise' - in the form of iterative transports - that the CAB has to work through and decipher. "The other piece I wouldn't be willing to live without is the ability to analyze a change for dependencies, conflicts, etc," Ridley continues. "ActiveControl gives us a very proactive view of developments. We can see every development in our environment and it lets us know whether we should deploy a release or hold back until it's ready."

An agile future

Having fully embedded automation into their SAP change and release processes, CBH are now investigating agile SAP development as part of another company-wide initiative. Like many organizations, rather than enforcing a 'big bang' cutover they are employing a step-by-step approach in which the new way of working is adopted by each team as appropriate, when it's clear that benefits will accrue. CBH's SAP team plans to use an agile approach to further reduce development cycle times, increase quality and improve planning and visibility across the board. It will provide a framework to move away from ad-hoc releases to a more structured, albeit still frequent, release cadence.

Fortunately, with ActiveControl in place CBH already have the automation that allows them to get started with agile as soon as they're ready. The tool will continue to provide the support needed to further refine their development approach in future, should they decide to move towards CI/CD and DevOps for SAP.

"
I would drop ActiveControl into an SAP installation as large as ours in a heartbeat.
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Conclusion

ActiveControl has transformed the way that CBH manages their SAP systems, enabling them to significantly accelerate SAP change while providing an unprecedented level of governance and control.

Quality has increased thanks to extensive analysis that runs automatically before transports leave the development system, which in turn has significantly reduced both reliance on an external service provider and the amount of rework necessary, thereby accelerating delivery of innovation. Combined with full and transparent CAB oversight of all SAP change, this increase in speed and governance has increased end user confidence in the stability of CBH's SAP systems.

ActiveControl also provides the flexibility needed as CBH consider how best to adopt modern development approaches like agile. "The two greatest benefits that we've got out of ActiveControl are more rapid deployment, plus governance," concludes Phil Ridley. "They're the two keys for us."

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 and Certified for use on both S/4HANA and Netweaver, 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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