

AMERICAN FOODS GROUP TRANSFORMS BUSINESS SYSTEMS WITH HELP FROM LOGICALIS

Fulfilling customers' needs is the name of the game at American Foods Group. The simple act of listening to the customer has turned this company into one of the preferred providers of fresh and frozen meats to some of the largest retailers and national food distributors. Headquartered in Green Bay, Wisconsin, their primary business is in the harvest and fabrication of cattle into boxed beef and the sales and marketing of value-added beef and brand products. Established in 1985 by current co-CEO Carl W. Kuehne, American Foods Group has experienced success by being customer-focused, performance-driven, and relationship-oriented. Targeted partnerships and the desire to meet the customer's expectations 100 percent of the time have been the key to their continued success and growth.

In July of 2005, American Foods Group and Rosen's Diversified, Inc. of Fairmont, Minnesota, announced their plan to merge to create a new national food company that would be known as American Foods Group, LLC. The new expanded company has operations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, Ohio, Nebraska, and Virginia. The merger provided new opportunities and areas of growth for the company and their more than 3,000 associates.

Merging companies creates challenges—especially when it comes to integrating information systems. The new company found itself with a mixture of technology applications and interfaces. Rosen was running a decentralized organization with a separate Windows® solution at all four of their fresh meat plants. To get the desired business results, it was necessary to get everyone on a centralized system in a very short timeframe. The main challenge was to agree on how to centralize and what system to use. "American Foods had the solutions that the company wanted to run," states Lou Ann Bannow, VP of IT. "But it was character-based (green screen), and the Rosen group was used to Windows-based screens and required that

type of interface." With a very aggressive timeframe in place, they started looking at options that could get the company from five separate business systems to one centralized system with a graphical user interface.



American Foods began by looking at two options—having the software vendor of the Windows applications create a centralized solution or taking the current green-screen application from software vendor SSA and upgrading it to a new Windows-based release with a graphical user interface.

"As we looked into these options, we found that neither were going to work out," states Bannow. Centralizing the data on the Windows applications was not working. Next, they looked at upgrading the SSA software and found that the customizations they had made over the past seven years would make it impossible to accomplish in the given timeframe. Plus, the upgrade from SSA was new and not currently in production.

Logicalis has been a preferred technology partner of American Foods Group for many years. During a regular meeting, they shared their current needs with Logicalis, looking for suggestions. "I introduced the idea of using transformation software to front end their SSA application to give them the desired look and feel they wanted," states Tony Fischer, Logicalis Account Executive. Changing the existing screens to Windows would allow them to keep their modifications to the software, provide a quicker implementation time, and add access to the application from the Internet. This idea took hold, and American Foods Group started to pursue this option. After carefully considering the complex needs of this project, Logicalis put together a proposal that recommended the IBM Host Access Transformation Server (HATS) to make-over their application.

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“Our team met to discuss the client’s needs and timeframe to ensure that the right solution was presented,” states Bob Verheyen, Logicalis VP of Service Operations. “We did not want to make any assumptions regarding what they needed.” The HATS software makes 3270 and 5250 applications available as HTML through web browsers, while converting host screens to a web look and feel. HATS is a rule-based transformation engine that is a zero-footprint, zero-download, Web-to-host solution. The power of HATS lies in its ability to accurately recognize the components of host screens and transform them in real time to a web interface according to a set of predefined rules. HATS has macrosupport that allows you to provide programmed navigation through multiple legacy screens to improve the productivity and ease of use of host applications. HATS enables programmed access to a single host application or can integrate screens from multiple host applications into a single web interface.

Logicalis’ project team created a proof-of-concept on five order entry screens so American Foods could make sure the solution would give them the desired end results. “We initially considered two partners to do this work. We chose Logicalis based on our relationship and because they were responsive and provided thought leadership. Logicalis reacted much quicker than the other partner and had the proof-of-concept created for the project before the other partner could even put a proposal together,” says Bannow. Once approved,

Logicalis got to work ASAP on the project. As work progressed, additional needs became apparent—such as the need for single sign-on due to the number of applications that were running in the environment. Logicalis presented the concept of a portal to American Foods. Because the HATS solution was built on the IBM WebSphere Portal framework, it was easy to address the single sign-on issue by using Portal and portlets to display access to all applications from any browser.

Additional functionality was added to the portal by creating a customized sales bulletin board portlet for the sales department that would allow the different facilities to stay informed on pricing changes and other market information. This presented consistency to customers—regardless of which location they were working with.

With a goal to have the solution fully integrated across all divisions of the company, American Foods looks forward to the associated benefits it will bring. “The key thing is centralizing the systems to make our business more efficient,” states Bannow. “Our sales team will be more competitive by having access to the inventory at all the plants through one system. We will reduce the amount of accounts receivable work, and our customer service should be second to none.” Logicalis looks forward to working with American Foods to transform its business applications and helping them create a competitive advantage in the food distribution market.

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ABOUT LOGICALIS

Logicalis is an international provider of integrated information and communications technology (ICT) solutions and services founded on a superior breadth of knowledge and expertise in communications and collaboration, data center optimization, application development and integration, and outsourcing and managed services.

With its international headquarters in the UK, Logicalis Group employs more than 1,900 people worldwide, including highly trained service specialists who design, specify, deploy, and manage complex ICT infrastructures to meet the needs of more than 6,500 corporate and public sector customers. To achieve this, Logicalis maintains strong partnerships with technology leaders such as Cisco, HP, IBM, and Microsoft.

The Logicalis Group has annualized revenues in excess of \$1 billion from operations in the UK, US, Germany, Latin America, and Asia Pacific, and is fast establishing itself as one of the leading IT and communications service providers, specializing in the areas of advanced technologies and services.

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