ConAgra: Cutting Application Development Rework 71% with SAP® Application Visualization by iRise

ConAgra Foods Inc. wanted to speed development by better matching an application's specifications with the needs it is intended to serve. The firm found the ideal tool for the purpose: SAP® Application Visualization software by iRise. The first application done with visualization, which previously would have taken eight months to complete, went live in just four weeks.

Executive overview

Company
ConAgra Foods Inc.

Headquarters
Omaha, Nebraska

Industry
Consumer Products

Products and Services
Food products

Employees
26,000

Revenue
US$13.3 billion

Web Site
www.conagrafoods.com

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

The company's top objectives
- Speed application development
- Improve match between application functionality and real requirements
- Increase collaboration and synergy between developers and business users

The resolution
- Piloted the SAP® Application Visualization software by iRise
- Selected a pilot project: centralized cockpit for issuing process manufacturing goods with important new functionality
- Used SAP Application Visualization to visualize the behavior of the centralized cockpit application

The key benefits
- Demonstrated the centralized cockpit solution to business users prior to actual development
- Identified need for multiple requirement changes before coding began
- Accelerated delivery of the centralized cockpit application and improved its quality

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TOP BENEFITS ACHIEVED

71%
Reduction in application rework

30 hours
Time needed to develop visualization

87%
Reduction in application development time

See more metrics ▶

"Before, our business users would give an idea to IT. They'd develop it, but then the users would say, 'That's not what we want.' With SAP Application Visualization, what you see is what you get."

Brian Grad, Manager of IT, ConAgra Foods Inc.

Getting specifications right the first time

ConAgra Foods is a major foods company and is the trusted name behind such leading brands as Healthy Choice, Chef Boyardee, Egg Beaters, Hebrew National, Hunt's, Orville Redenbacher's, PAM, and Banquet.

Like businesses everywhere, ConAgra has an IT staff that does its best to meet the needs of business users with the applications it develops. The company used to employ the classic approach to development in which users describe their requirements to IT in the form of functional documentation, and then IT follows that set of specifications in coding up the application. After a lengthy development phase, however, users invariably found that the application missed the mark in many respects and required substantial rework. Often multiple rounds of recoding were required before the application satisfied the real need, if it ever did at all. Too often the end results were project delays and frustration on the part of developers and users alike. "Our vision was to find a way to show users what their application would look like before the coding began," says Brian Grad, IT manager for ConAgra. "That way they could see how the specifications they'd

provided needed to be changed to reflect their true requirements, so when the developers did the coding, they would do it right the first time."

ConAgra has long used SAP® software for its core business needs, and it looks first to SAP for any new software requirements. When the company approached SAP about its vision, SAP responded with SAP Application Visualization software by iRise.

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The behavior of the finished app without one line of code

SAP explained that unlike traditional requirements tools, SAP Application Visualization can be used to quickly create fully interactive, high-definition visualizations that look and behave exactly like the final business application. "We learned that without having to write a single line of code, companies around the world are using it to create interactive visualizations using their actual data, providing a platform for real-time collaboration between developers and users that zeroes in on the real needs," reports Grad.

SAP offered to pilot the application to make it easier for ConAgra to justify investing in it. SAP's partner iRise performed the software installation, a smooth process that finished right on schedule and budget.

As a pilot application, ConAgra selected a very important real requirement: the development of a centralized cockpit for its process manufacturing activities. The goal was to simplify the process for two methods of posting goods issued for manufacturing. The new process for one of them allows users to perform multiple operations at one time from a single screen, while the new process

for the other allows users to enter and post data, duplicate records, and view alternatives from a single screen. Business users from ConAgra created a document containing all the requirements they thought they needed.

After just 30 hours of setup and with no actual coding, the team from iRise presented what an application would look like if developers had followed the requirements document. Using a sample of actual ConAgra data, the visualization showed what the contents of each screen would be and allowed interaction that displayed the specified screen-to-screen flow.

Getting the specs right before coding begins

The users found many gaps, requirements that should have been in the specifications but weren't. They also found several requirements that should not have been in the document at all and many that needed to be altered. "In all, out of the 38 requirements, only 11 required no change," reports Grad. "These problems very likely would not have been identified under our old methodology until after the application had been coded up."

Because of the pilot's striking success, ConAgra proceeded to purchase SAP Application

Visualization, train 300 users, and move it into production.

Meanwhile, following the revised specifications, the company coded up the manufacturing cockpit application, which took only four weeks. "Without visualization, it would have taken eight months. It's now in full-scale production, saving tens of thousands of hours per year," says Grad. "The experience also improved the relationship between our users and developers."

KEY BENEFITS

71%
Reduction in application rework

8 months
Estimated development time without the tool

200
Users trained on SAP Application Visualization

4 weeks
Application development time

+**64**K hours
Annual savings in goods issuing
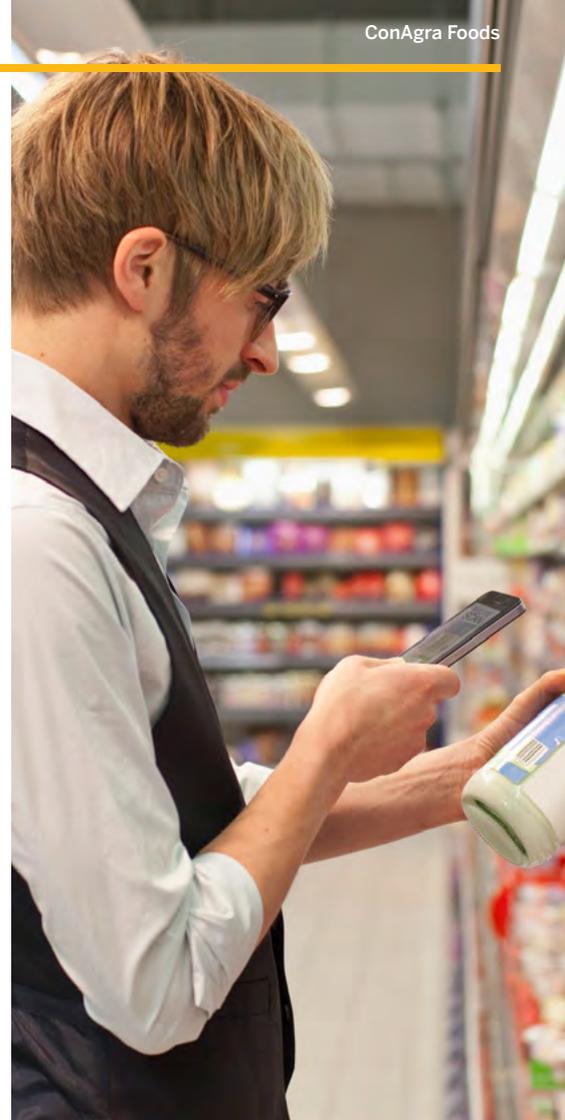
Getting everybody on the same page quickly

SAP Application Visualization is now a fixture in ConAgra's application development process, routinely saving substantial coding time while delivering higher quality results. Since completing the manufacturing cockpit, the company has used it on many more applications – for customer interaction, sales force automation, trade promotion, and several other purposes in manufacturing. Over and over, these applications are completed in a small fraction of the time they would have taken without visualization.

"It was tremendous to see how quickly our developers and users get on the same page with SAP Application Visualization," concludes Grad. "It's an outstanding tool, and we've only just begun finding ways for it to help us."

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