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Morris Publishing Group LLC, the newspaper publishing arm of Augusta, Ga.-based Morris Communications Co. LLC, wanted to enhance the native change control capabilities of its newly implemented SAP® solution-based business information system. Morris Publishing Group centrally supports and coordinates corporate operations at 39 editorially independent newspapers and other publications in 14 states. Rev-Trac® change management, by Revelation Software Concepts Pty Ltd., provided the enhancements the editorially dispersed but financially integrated enterprise required.

## Integrating the Corporate Side of Independent News Operations

Morris Communications formed Morris Publishing Group in 2001 to support and centrally coordinate corporate operations of its editorially independent newspapers in 14 states. Shortly after it was formed, the group began a phased rollout of an enterprise-wide SAP solution-based business intelligence infrastructure. Its objective was to integrate, at the corporate level, all financial and much of the operational intelligence coming in from the company's varied publishing businesses, including the newspapers.

Dimensions of the Challenge

Morris Publishing Group needed to maintain the editorial independence of its operating units but leverage the advantages of a large, unified organization when negotiating with suppliers and other organizations. As a U.S. company, Morris also needed to comply with Sarbanes-Oxley reporting requirements, a task that would be greatly simplified by integrating corporate functions across all entities. Since such integration would affect all units, close coordination of changes was absolutely required.
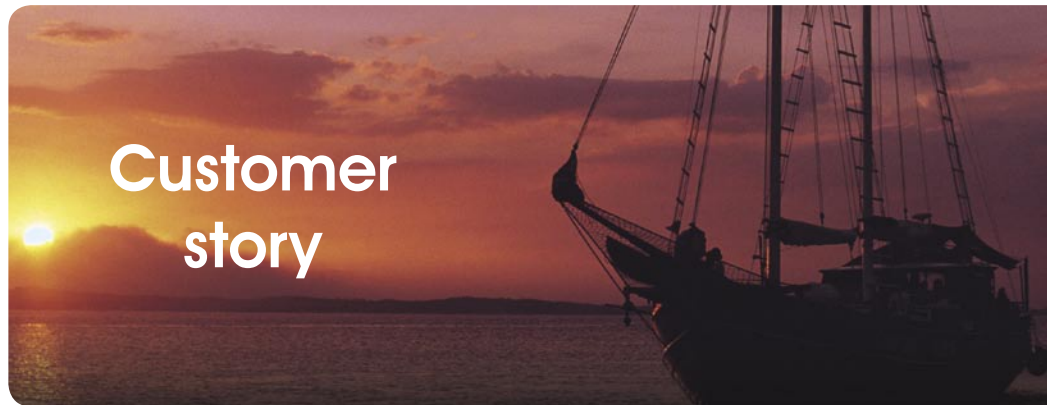
Customer story

Morris Technology Services, the technology provider for Morris Communications, was tasked to implement the SAP rollout in all Morris business units and the decision was made to target the Publishing Group first. To meet its goals there, Morris needed to integrate financial data coming in from many different locations, not always in identical formats. The IT team utilized the amazing flexibility of the new SAP-based solution to meet those specific needs. However, centralizing these operations meant that changes in one area now affected every part of the Publishing Group system. Errors in implementing changes had to be kept to an absolute minimum.

With Morris' multiple quasi-independent entities, close coordination was a challenge. Even simple changes made to satisfy business or legal requirements could involve many changes by developers, some involving configuration, others changes to programs, tables, field labels, screens, help texts and more. An extensive business requirement might involve several developers, each saving changes to multiple transports. For the business logic to work as expected, every transport must be migrated in the right sequence.

When left to humans, such processes are subject to human error, notes Bruce Paulus, software quality assurance manager for Morris Technology Services. For example, a single, unresolved "orphan" transport can disrupt the system if accidentally imported incorrectly. Multiple transports needed for a single

> "Rev-Trac links it all to the business logic, so as development continues, nothing falls between the cracks. Between that and the required authorizations, we never have to wonder where a change came from or why it got put in the hopper."
>
> Bruce Paulus,
> Software Quality Assurance Manager

change in business logic may get out of sequence. Transport migrations may be left unfinished.

The team found itself restoring backups often enough to impact the overall project. Verifying each transport manually was more than just time-consuming, it was becoming costly.

Surveying the Field

The transition team needed a solution, and Paulus realized it would take enhanced change management, not just transport management of the sort built into SAP-based solutions. He went looking for the answer.

Initially, Paulus reviewed change management products for various application development projects, even including several used outside of SAP solution environments. He hoped to find one tool suitable for all Morris in-house projects. The search failed because the operating environments varied and because SAP products use an internal language specific to SAP solutions.

He focused next on change management products developed specifically for SAP-based environments. He found that only Rev-Trac had the features needed for the extensive and highly dispersed Morris infrastructure. Most of what Morris needed came as a standard part of the basic Rev-Trac package, and they could configure the rest during implementation.

"When we found problems internally involving missing transports, the cost per incident turned out to be fairly significant. If we could eliminate just two incidents annually, we could justify the cost of Rev-Trac in the first year."

The Rev-Trac Solution

In recommending Rev-Trac, Paulus noted that Rev-Trac flags sequencing errors all along the chain, from development through to production. The software forces developers to associate every new transport with a Rev-Trac "request," a record that represents a single business requirement. Rev-Trac holds the request and its associated transports together in one conceptual "container" with all associated documentation and approvals. It ensures that all transports get released and migrated in the correct sequence, no matter how extensive the system modification.

Rev-Trac's reporting, viewing and logging functions also fit very well with new Sarbanes-Oxley reporting requirements, making legal compliance much easier. Required reports not part of the standard change management package are straightforward to infer from standard information Rev-Trac does directly provide.

The Installation

"Installation was a snap," reports Paulus. "They gave us a preparation checklist to eliminate most of the snags before we even started. The process itself went very smoothly. We spent Monday finishing the installation and linking things up. We had our transport movement history loaded by mid-afternoon Tuesday and started the training process before we were halfway through the week."

Paulus says RSC's support has been excellent. "The RSC trainer had a lot of BASIS knowledge so he and our BASIS manager traded tips," Paulus says. "He even helped us with some non-Rev-Trac issues and the turnaround was very timely, including a custom change."

The Rev-Trac Difference

When the Morris Publishing Group found internal problems, especially with missing transports, it tracked its costs. The cost per incident turned out to be significant.

"We calculated the time we spent restoring the environment and reloading transports, and extrapolated the cost if it were actually in a production environment," comments Paulus. "If we could eliminate only two incidents a year, we could justify the cost of Rev-Trac in the first year, combined with the savings on BASIS."

He adds, "We didn't even try to put an ROI on the headaches that Rev-Trac prevented, but to me, they count too." Rev-Trac makes it easy to identify "orphan" transports and other problems, he explains, and to quarantine them, preventing errors later on.

"When we looked at the initial Rev-Trac reports we found quite a few inconsistencies across our various environments," notes Paulus. "For instance, the QA environment might be missing an object that was present everywhere else, which can impact the QA itself. Rev-Trac now warns us if that happens. It also tells us if an object will be overwritten by an older version of the same object. It saves us trouble, because Rev-Trac generates that report every time transports are migrated from one system to another. We get continuous feedback."

Moving Forward

Using the existing Outlook-based notification system at Morris, Rev-Trac now provides complete control of tracking, linking documents and linking all specs to change requests. This eliminates previous storage challenges because of specs being stored in various areas, so Rev-Trac also eliminated any need to buy a separate document management tool.

As the phased rollout continues, Morris expects to see the savings and enhanced operation expand as its SAP solution-based business information system propagates throughout the extensive Morris Communications corporate structure.

Rev-Trac®
Now you're really in control
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"Rev-Trac allows us to recover easily from past errors. If we had this from the beginning, we'd have saved a lot of time and effort. We would have known about these impending problems ahead of time."

Bruce Paulus,
Software Quality Assurance Manager