



FORFARMERS MOVES ORACLE EPM ENVIRONMENT TO INLUMI DATA CENTRE

ForFarmers was already a satisfied inlumi customer when they decided to replace the financial consolidation environment in 2015. The functional part of the project was being headed by ForFarmers, Group Control, supported by external consultants, while inlumi was responsible for the technical side. "We started immediately after the summer and had the ambition of processing the 2015 year-end closing in the new Oracle Hyperion EPM environment. Although a challenging deadline, we managed to meet in with time to spare." Project leader Edwin Schierboom looks back and shares his experiences.

ForFarmers is an internationally operating enterprise active in conventional and organic feed solutions for livestock. With sales of approximately 9.1 million tonnes of feed annually, ForFarmers is a market leader in Total Feed Solutions in Europe. In addition to animal feed, ForFarmers supplies commodities for arable farming and pasture management, and offers customers additional knowledge and advice in the areas of feed, livestock farming and business development.

Flotation forces adjustments

In early 2015, ForFarmers decided to replace its financial consolidation environment, a

decision informed by the organisation's intended stock market flotation which was scheduled for 2016. Since May 24, 2016 ForFarmers has been listed on Euronext Amsterdam. "Preparations for the flotation meant, among other things, that we had to start working in accordance with the IFRS reporting standards, which - given that our old software did not support this - made it clear that we had no choice but to purchase new software," says Schierboom.

The choice fell on Oracle Hyperion EPM. The technical implementation of this software involved far less time and effort than its configuration. "We had to set up our entire

Company: ForFarmers
Activity: Animal feed producers
Head office: Lochem, The Netherlands
Employees: 2,400
Contact: Edwin Schierboom, Oracle EPM implementation project manager
inlumi engaged for: the technical implementation of EPM and hosting for a three-year period.

financial reporting again. That meant devising a new ledger structure, setting up a new annual report, and so on. It was a huge job for which we engaged the support of a few additional resources to be able to combine the day to day activities, IFRS implementation and project."

The project started in August 2015, and our aim was to process our annual reporting for 2015 in EPM. This was a very ambitious

plan, as Schierboom can confirm. “All the more so because at the time we also had to develop a new reporting profile due to all the disclosures as a consequence of the IFRS transition. Of course, we had an existing administration to use as a starting point, but in fact we more or less started from scratch.”

Two-part migration

Given the scale of the job, we decided to first transfer the Group Control department to the new environment and for the four country offices to continue working with the old system for a period. A fortunate choice, says Schierboom. “We overhauled our reporting to such an extent that it was difficult to see the relationship between the functional and the technical aspects of the software at the start of the project. Of course, we started with a good plan, but needed to adjust aspects as insights evolved. Moreover, our financial people were not knowledgeable on the technical side of the application. In addition, the new Oracle EPM environment needed to comply with the IT policies of the company. The IT staff is less involved in certain elements and the functional setup as designed by the project team. By starting with Group Control, we limited the number of people who were directly involved and a smaller group was able to work on devising the ideal structure.”

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However, the group of those directly involved was not particularly limited. In addition to the Group Control employees, it included the IT department, third party employees and inlumi consultants. Looking back, Schierboom thinks certain procedures could have been clearer. “It was not always clear who our specific contact person was on certain topics and where the responsibility of one person ended and that of someone else began. There were grey areas we had to deal with. Fortunately, everything worked out in the end thanks to the effective cooperation, but in hindsight, it would have been better to have designated a single point of contact for each party. That



way, it would have been easier to keep sight of the big picture.”

Tight deadlines

Despite the sometimes tight milestones in the project, everything went according to schedule. In early December, Oracle Hyperion EPM went live in a test environment that was built on the inlumi Rapid Deployment Kit (RDKit). The November reporting was produced in this new environment. Schierboom explains: “That was a trial run – we produced the actual monthly report still using our former environment. The trial run showed that we still needed to do some fine-tuning, but it didn’t throw up any unsolvable problems. In addition to this, we created a “go live criteria list” which was discussed with the steering committee of the project multiple times. We decided to produce the year-end closing on the new EPM only, in order not to have to do any double work. “To be safe and manage risks, we still had the old system available, but this would have caused many additional issues due to less reporting-related possibilities. Luckily, we did not need to revert to the old system as the transfer of the test environment to production went smoothly.”

Training staff in the test environment

The first months of 2016 still saw ForFarmers making intensive use of the test environment, and not just to test software changes before starting production. Schierboom says, “We also use the test environment to train users. We have branches in four countries: the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and the UK, representing a total of around 30 people busy with month-end closing in a consolidation tool. They have started working with EPM in April and May. In preparation, they were

all trained using a copy of our production environment in March and April. During those training sessions, we received valuable feedback on the structure of the system. Changes prompted by that feedback will first be implemented before we transfer all users to the new environment.”

These changes concern several small adjustments to the basic structure of the environment, and not additional functionality. Though there is plenty of desire for that, too, says Schierboom. “Our idea was to first set up a solid foundation on which we could build further. We are happy with the results of this approach. It was born in part out of necessity, since we only had a limited amount of time. But getting the foundation right at the outset means you can focus much more on the priorities. The house itself is now completed, but we still have to finish making the attic and lay out the garden.” It is a fitting metaphor which points out that we considered the basic system structure to be an important investment. “Indeed,” laughs Schierboom, “we have built a solid foundation, which you don’t want to have to remodel later on. This has to be right from the get-go. This also makes it possible to add additional functionalities such as the ability to have monthly and yearly figures available for the iPad, for example.”

Looking back, Schierboom feels a great sense of satisfaction: “Certain aspects could have gone more smoothly, but considering the scale and complexity of the project, we did a good job. The cooperation between third party personnel, inlumi and ourselves was effective, and we didn’t encounter serious problems at any stage. I think all parties that were involved deserve a compliment.”