Global Transformation

Infosys helps UL fortify its international reach with ERP system

by Alison Weiss, March 2014

As products increasingly are produced in one country but consumed by another, product safety and quality have become critical international issues. In the U.S., alone, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) reported in 2011 that 50 percent of all medical devices and 80 percent of the active pharmaceutical ingredients in medications sold in the country were manufactured elsewhere. And this international product manufacturing trend shows no sign of abating.

Underwriter Laboratories LLC (UL), headquartered in Northbrook, Ill., has offered safety science services for over 118 years to safeguard not just the manufacturing of products, but people and places as well. Indeed, every year, 22 billion products manufactured have UL certification marks, and the average household has approximately 120 products that carry UL certification.

Over the last few years, UL leaders have faced unprecedented demand for their safety science services from companies that are diversifying beyond the U.S. into new markets and sourcing components from around the world. In fact, today UL generates over 50 percent of its revenue outside the US. Company executives needed to make sure they provided the same high level of quality as they coped with the growing demand. First, they changed from a non-profit to a for-profit organization to compete more effectively in the marketplace, and then they made 25 strategic international acquisitions to broaden the types of services provided to customers.

To manage such rapid growth, UL executives needed an integrated suite of business applications that would help them to more easily integrate acquisitions, operate global business units more consistently, and ultimately meet the varied safety science service needs of its customers around the world. UL IT executives chose Oracle Diamond Partner Infosys Ltd. (Infosys) (@Infosys) to implement a transformational Oracle E-Business Suite-based system across 108 locations in 39 countries.

According to Simin Zhou, Vice President of Strategy and EP at UL, bringing aboard geographically diverse acquisitions has required new ways of operating. “Before, we operated country by country. Everybody had different cultures and service offerings, and they also had their own systems with visibility into their own pipeline,” says Zhou. “Overall visibility from an IT point of view was a problem.”

Company leaders directed Zhou and her team to implement a single technology platform across all UL business units to facilitate common business processes—but the project would need to be completed in just two years. Zhou knew just which company to call: Infosys, UL’s long-standing strategic partner in consulting and technology. Infosys is headquartered in Bangalore, India and has 73 offices around the world.

As a long-time Oracle Diamond partner, Infosys has extensive implementation experience with end-to-end Oracle E-Business Suite solutions. “We bought our deep consulting and technology expertise in Oracle to UL’s business transformation journey,” says Eric Rich, vice president of the Consulting and Systems Integration Practice at Infosys.

“Delivering on time, on budget, and on value was absolutely essential for UL. This was achieved on all counts, which was a challenge considering the diverse business processes, work environments, cultures, and languages within the scope of this global program.”

Keys to success included rigorous and continuous focus on program management, organization change management, and scope control. UL executive involvement was also a major factor in ensuring the delivery of maximum business benefits. “With the successful completion of this program, we’ve established a scalable and flexible Oracle solution to enable quicker onboarding of future acquired businesses, paving the way for incremental business value and revenue expansion in the coming years for UL,” says Rich.

The goal was for Infosys and UL IT staff members to work collaboratively for three months and create a project road map. Mahesh Lakshmanan, client partner at Infosys, says that the tremendous amount of knowledge the Infosys team possesses about Oracle E-Business Suite and UL operations helped streamline the planning process to determine how best to address a number of issues, such as order entry and order management. Then, Infosys experts worked in tandem with UL IT staff members to implement approximately 35 Oracle E-Business Suite modules.

Change management was an issue during the rollout of the new system, but Infosys experts and IT staff for UL worked cooperatively to educate users. “We had a high trust factor with UL staff,” says Lakshmanan. “We were a united team working as one, and that was absolutely critical.”

Indrani Mukherjee, associate vice president and global delivery head at Infosys, says, “Infosys has worked with UL for many years, and we have a deep understanding of the UL businesses and IT systems. Our experience in driving transformation change initiatives, leveraging Infosys IMPACT and VRM frameworks, along with a deep understanding of UL and certification industry business, helped us in building this robust business platform. Defining and retaining the global solution allowing very few changes across various businesses, geographies spanning across 40 countries, diverse cultures and local business needs, have been one of the key reasons for success of this program.”

Today, the Oracle E-Business Suite business platform is not only providing benefits across all business units with traditional backend procedures such as finance, but it is also offering measurable benefits with customer-facing tasks. For example, UL is leveraging iStore to enable customers to make purchases, and iReceivables to allow...
customers to go online and view invoices and payments.

“We’re also generating quote and order documents and invoices in many different languages around the world with our new system,” Zhou says. “And by adopting Oracle standards we’ve eliminated a lot of our older, cumbersome UL-specific processes.”

Further, the new global E-Business Suite’s system’s use of Oracle Business Intelligence Enterprise Edition has improved and streamlined reporting and made it more consistent. In the past, just one business unit alone had 15,000 reports. Now, users can do daily self-service reporting instead of depending on weekly reports because the new platform enables data to be captured at a granular level. In addition, customer information has been consolidated from 25 different locations across all business units into one central place with the implementation of Oracle Master Data Hub.

Ultimately, Infosys’ implementation of Oracle E-Business suite helped UL meet the demands of a growing international customer base while continuing to provide a high level of safety science services. As an illustration of the success of the new global system, UL recently was able to bring aboard a newly acquired business based in Switzerland in just four weeks.

“What’s exciting about the transformation project we just completed with the help of Infosys is that we’ve built our underlying data structure so we are more aligned with our international customers around their data and product information and how we certify products and standards,” says Zhou. “It allows us to do so much more in terms of meeting customer needs in broader ways.”

Alison Weiss is a frequent contributor to Profit.