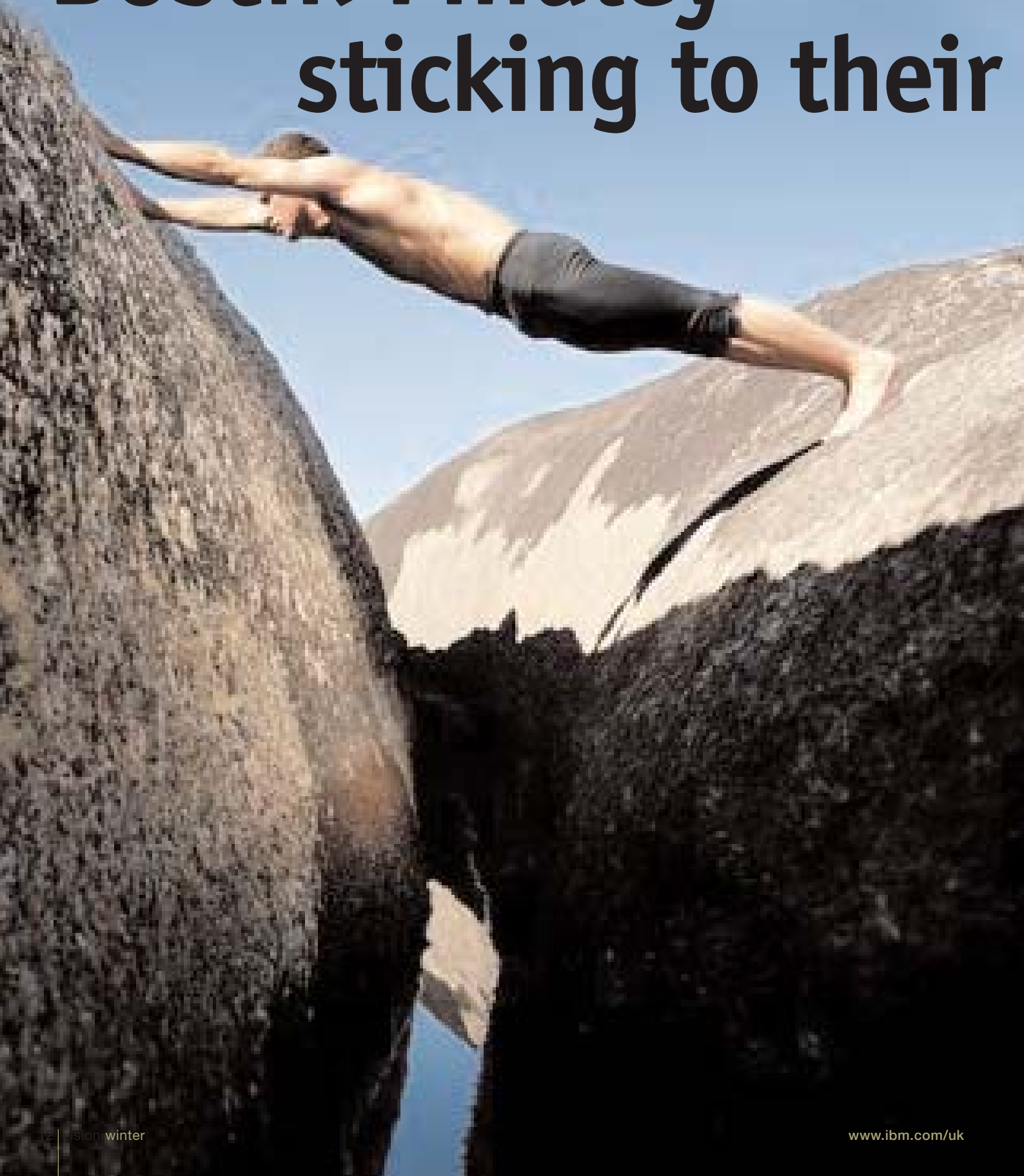


Bostik Findley— sticking to their



Having customer information held by individual sales staff on scraps of paper may not be a huge problem for a small company, but when Bostik merged and more than doubled in size, the need for integrating data became clear

customers... like glue

For a company that is a household name in adhesives, Bostik's old information system didn't show much sign of joined-up thinking. Instead the details of 3,500 separate products, divided up across four different market sectors, lay scattered around the organisation. "The database of customer information that was key to our survival was usually found in the boots of our sales reps' cars, in disparate PCs or just in their heads," remarks Kaushik Parekh, IT support manager for Bostik Findley. In part this was due to the merger of Bostik with Ato Findley in 2000. The merger saw them change from single-site operations with a couple of hundred staff to a multiple-site company employing 600 people and with a product offering that was doubled at a stroke.

In many ways it was a classic instance of the growing pains of an SME. Without the deep pockets and long investment cycles of large enterprises, the company had been making do with a patchwork of products, systems, and methodologies that had worked well for individual departments over the years. Without a centralised IT strategy for managing the information, each department had been left to work out its own ways of capturing and recording information whether that meant using a laptop or a Post-It Note. This was fine up to a point, but problems started to become apparent as the company grew and found itself struggling to manage an information deluge.

Changing needs

With the merger Bostik Findley had successfully broken into the big time with a 50-60 percent share of the worldwide adhesives market, itself worth \$10.7 million. In the process it also found itself competing for space with well known giants such as Borden Chemical and the 3M Corp. Successful information management was no longer a matter of staying on top of

things in a day-to-day manner, but being able to implement in-depth analysis of information, basing strategic decisions on the result. Unfortunately, at this time Bostik Findley's field force and its central ordering department was still using a mixture of paper notes, faxes and phone calls to place orders and keep track of their hundreds of customers and 3,500 products. The resultant communications flow was complex and unwieldy, and could easily fail to deliver at a time when smooth and instant communications were needed between the field, headquarters and customers across three sites and four separate divisions.

"There was overlap and confusion between the field force and the central ordering department in Leicester," Parekh recalls. "Sometimes it would take a day or so before a rep's order got placed, and then it was without full knowledge about our inventories and shipping schedule. At other times, the customer would call the order centre directly, and the sales rep might be caught blindsided if there was a negotiation going on that conflicted with the order. Or worse yet, the customer might have called headquarters with a complaint a day or two before the rep was supposed to make a call on the client. There could be some embarrassing moments."

That problem was made worse by the fact that the different divisions of the company historically dealt with customers in very

different ways. In the consumer area it sells directly to retailers, but in the construction business it is via distributors, while in the automotive sector the relationship is directly with major clients such as Ford.

Having a different strategy for each sector meant that procedures varied from one to the next. Key sales reps effectively controlled their own sectors, and the nature of sales reps to guard their turf jealously made it potentially difficult if things changed in any way. "If a rep became ill or left the business," says Parekh, "the key database we needed to serve the customer could literally be sitting locked up in the boot of the rep's car." The company was largely unaware of day-to-day developments in individual sectors, and areas of it could be brought to a halt through data bottlenecks.

"Bostik's existing IT infrastructure wasn't up to the complex challenge the firm was facing," Parekh confirms, "we needed a faster, more comprehensive way to communicate between our sales reps, customers and our headquarters." Parekh and Bostik went shopping for the solution to the problem.

Sticking it all together

For advice, Bostik turned to Kelros, a company providing the largest suite of ready-to-use Customer Relation Management (CRM) applications in Europe. Bostik and Kelros agreed that what was needed was a modular

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Kaushik Parekh, Bostik Findley



Overview

Lotus Domino Express

IBM Lotus Domino Messaging Express, IBM Lotus Domino Collaboration Express and IBM Lotus Domino Utility Server Express are three new versions of market-leading Lotus collaboration software, designed for SMEs.

Like all certified IBM Software Express offerings, Domino Express offers big business technology, but optimised for use by SMEs. Features include cost-effective messaging functionality, simplified licensing and reduced administration requirements. With the same enterprise-grade Lotus Domino and Notes 6 software that powers applications for

corporations worldwide, Domino Express makes the solid performance of IBM enterprise messaging and collaboration software accessible to smaller companies. The main advantages that make the offerings ideal for SMEs include the following:

- **Affordability** – While they would like to use sophisticated enterprise-style solutions, many SMEs consider them to be out of their price range. Now IBM Lotus Domino Express offerings mean that whether they have as many as 1,000 employees or as few as five, businesses can have the

messaging and collaboration solution that meets both their needs and their budget.

- **Reliability** – These applications provide complete end-to-end solutions, with proven levels of security and performance.

- **Simplicity of use** – The software simplifies complex management tasks, thereby increasing performance and uptime. Administrative control can be improved with tools such as policies, archiving, mail quota management and spam filtering. As well as being easy to learn,

Domino technology's flexibility and customisation options make it adaptable to changing needs.

- **Ease of installation** – Streamlined administrative tasks save disk space, improve performance and enhance replication; the straightforward set-up process means these benefits can be felt immediately.

- **Integration** – Domino technology complements other applications servers, such as IBM Lotus Instant Messaging servers, IBM WebSphere application server and Microsoft Exchange.

system with the flexibility to adapt to the growing needs of the separate divisions, pooling all the information in a shared, collaborative work system.

In 2003, Bostik Findley installed a complete CRM solution from Kelros. It replicates data to all 125 sales reps in the field and to the headquarters, working as the middleware between the company's Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system and the sales reps. "The back end is the ERP system", explains Paul Mason, Kelros Sales Director, "but the thing about an ERP system is that it is only accessible when you are on the network and in the case of Bostik their sales force is remote, so we implemented Lotus Notes as the middleware and use Kelros Sales as the front end in a 'portal' approach. This means sales data is now replicated via the portal anywhere in the world, while any sales staff logging on

to the portal gets access to customer data that was previously only available back in the office when they could access the ERP system."

Making it relevant

It's that two-way information flow – from the sales staff in the field back to head office and from the ERP system out to the sales reps – that makes the whole thing work. Because with salespeople, the problem wasn't buying a tool or installing software, it was making it relevant so that they could see the benefit of sharing their precious customer information. "It is common for information to be stuck in the heads of sales people or filed away in spreadsheets, documents, and scraps of paper that simply aren't managed by the IT department," notes Mason. "Sales teams have been historically the hardest to roll out a solution to as they all have their own private

ways of logging data and the last thing they want is to toss all their information into a goldfish bowl that anyone can look into." Collaborative data sharing not only sounds like management double-speak, it also flies in the face of the sales person's natural desire to guard information so as to make themselves indispensable. So never mind the middleware, how do you get sales staff to share?

The first stage of the process consists of education – letting staff know just why the company needs the information, and how that is going to help them in their roles. In this case, explaining that the system gave remote staff access to the ERP system was a key benefit that could be highlighted to employees.

Continued training

The system's partner should not melt away once the hardware and software is in place – the role of educator continues long after the system is up and running. Mason is emphatic on this: "Post-implementation hands-on training is the key. We make sure it is conducted off-site to help people focus on the job in hand, and that it's done with genuine customer data and contact names to make it as real as possible. You have to ensure that people realise the benefits and really want to use the system. It's not enough that they understand how it works; they have to also appreciate that it will make their life easier." That also means tailoring the training to suit



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the fact that some individuals, often those of great value to the company, may resist change. “There will always be those who buck against the idea of centralised information and computer systems,” observes Mason. “When it comes to training we make sure we have three or four different sessions for different abilities and attitudes.”

Tuning the system

New users were trained for several days before going live, followed by refresher courses. These refreshers also provided valuable staff feedback. “We find that people come back to us and say ‘it would be nice if it could do this’, and we then fine-tune the application to match their requirements,” says Mason. The modularity of a system like Notes means that scaling and adapting it is easy and allows the partner to satisfy customer requirements that weren’t obvious, stated, or even in existence at the time of the initial implementation.

“Things staff have asked for include SMS technology integration so the company can send SMS messages to a sales person on the road,” says Mason, “and increased features for complaint management, target logging, and personal performance indicators – all of which are available as modules that can be grown from the system’s core.”

Amongst those modules being developed now are a customer feedback module aimed to track all incidents, criticisms, and comments – a process which tends to be haphazard or even non-existent in many companies. The aim is to build it into a reporting and analysis tool with a view to incorporating customer response into the product cycle.

Information access

For Bostik Findley the results have been dramatic. All information about customers is now held on a database that can be accessed both from head office and by staff in the field, including all the products customers buy, all their correspondence, and all their activities. Put together it offers a snapshot of the state of Bostik Findley’s business, with the added ability to isolate and examine individual customer satisfaction and spending patterns.

Where once the management had to wait for monthly activity reports to get an idea of developing trends, they now have a day-to-day system which goes a long way towards improving customer satisfaction.

It’s also become a great deal easier to communicate with customers. In order to keep ahead in a fiercely competitive field, Bostik Findley aims to launch 10 to 15 new products a year. With the old system the company simply couldn’t get out an announcement letter to all its customers. Now they’re logged into the system, communicating with them becomes far easier and makes two-way interaction much more convenient, thanks to the feedback module. Both the ERP and CRM systems hold the basic customer information, and this flows between them both in background mode. This ensures that they are equally up to date, whichever of the channels the information happens to be coming through.

The system has also improved communication within the company. The software’s ability to handle background replication means that shifting large documents around, including presentations and product specs, no longer risks bringing the solitary mail server to a grinding stop. Calendar management has also become simple since shared calendars are now the norm, allowing the ability to request time or block out sessions on team-mates’ schedules.

More sales, happier customers

According to Bostik Findley’s own findings, this has all resulted in a 20 percent increase in sales force efficiency. Given that customer acquisition costs more than customer retention, even that figure pales by comparison with the finding that customer retention and order conversion has increased by 15 per cent since the implementation. Harder to put a figure on is the perceived increase in customer satisfaction thanks to quicker turnaround and faster, more responsive communications.

“The new system for collating customer and sales data has really paid off both in sales force productivity and customer satisfaction”, notes Parekh. Of course it also means an end to the problem of sales reps being caught unaware

by customers calling the order centre directly, or the unpleasant scenario in which the company loses all records of customer interaction with a key client – because the sales rep has driven off with all the paperwork locked firmly in the boot of their car.

It’s hard to get precise percentage improvement figures on senior management anxiety levels, but it does seem safe to say that those in charge at Bostik Findley are sleeping more soundly at nights now that the future of key accounts is less likely to rely on a Post-It Note flapping in the breeze. **M**

express solution

Coordinating information

Problem: SMEs may feel that they lack the finances and training for software offering a reliable, systematic link-up of information between their sales force and head office.

Solutions:

IBM Lotus Domino Collaboration Express

Allows SMEs to use the messaging and collaborative capabilities of Domino, with high scalability and increased flexibility to maintain competitive advantage.

IBM Lotus Domino Utility Server Express

Provides unlimited access to collaborative applications, but does not allow the use of individual mail files. Makes applications available to both internal and external users.

IBM Lotus Domino Messaging Express

Offers SMEs a new choice in business messaging and group scheduling software, whether they are deploying email for the first time, or replacing existing email products.

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