



Case Study

Hi Fert



Hi Fert Relies on Service Desk Express Suite to Provide Exceptional Service to Customers and Dealers



One of the many challenges facing manufacturers in rain-based businesses is the degree of "gazing into a crystal ball" that is required to satisfy customers and dealers.

Since forecasting the weather is never an exact science, these organizations must find a more reliable way to ensure exceptional service to customers. That's why, in an industry where each day spells the difference between a good harvest and a bad one, Hi Fert turned to Planwell Technology to help improve its customer service.

Australia is the world's driest inhabited continent. It faces water shortages unparalleled in the two centuries since it was first settled by Europeans. A long-running drought in the country's east, the main farming belt, is being compounded by water shortages in the country's biggest cities. Sydney's main reservoir is at 40 percent of capacity and, like the capital Canberra, is in the grip of indefinite water restrictions.

Against this inhospitable backdrop, Hi Fert, one of the leaders in the agricultural industry, is continuing to provide the country's farmers with the growing edge they need to prosper.

Fighting his own battle against the drought is Hi Fert Fertilizers' one-man IT department, John Dunn. "They're talking about a once-in-a-thousand-years drought scenario for 2007," Dunn says bluntly. That drought, if it comes, is likely to spread across at least three states: a large portion of Victoria, the greater part of New South Wales, and some of South Australia and Queensland.

Hi Fert's business involves the manufacture and distribution of agricultural fertilizers. It has no retail presence, instead using distributors as its sales arm and as a way to maintain a direct relationship with farmers. The company built its name on soil analysis, which allowed it to manufacture fertilizers tailored to farmers' needs. Once a pasture has been seeded and treated with Hi Fert's products, a farmer is more accurately able to project the potential yields from the livestock or crops on the land.

Hi Fert's IT manager explains how its customised fertilizers work. "At the top of a hill, you need more nitrogen because all the rainfall ends up at the bottom of the hill," says Dunn. "At the bottom of the hill, you need more sulphur because it's wet. We can deliver a customized product that suits both the top and the bottom of the hill.

Our strength lies in our willingness to create a product for a farmer's need, rather than a bulk grade product that's one size fits all."

Climate clearly affects both company and customers, but it is just one of Dunn's challenges. Hi Fert's entirely outsourced IT department makes him a virtual "one-man band." Core infrastructure specialist Imtec looks after Microsoft Server 2003 and Exchange; Unisys supports Hi Fert's SAP environment; Active is the network provider; and Planwell Technology is the application specialist and integrator. IT management was outsourced before Dunn joined the company, so he found himself in a new role, simultaneously trying to get to know the vendor account managers, deal with day-to-day IT management, and service his increasingly disgruntled users.

"The major concern I faced as a service delivery manager was users ringing me and telling me they needed their password reset," says Dunn. "I'd scratch that on a piece of paper and, provided nobody else rang up and distracted me, I'd reset their password. If four other people rang before I managed to do it, they'd have to ring back." To complicate matters, Dunn's 170 users are spread over nine logical sites and 14 physical sites.

His 17 territory managers cover the entire state of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, half of South Australia, and a small part of the Northern Territory. "They're always on the road with laptops, mobiles, and mobile broadband data," he says. The company's dedicated dealer network — over 4,000 of them nationwide — is augmented by sales specialists and agronomists.

Until Dunn joined the company, Hi Fert had no means of supporting these remote workers; no dedicated service desk to log their problems and help resolve them. "We had nothing," says Dunn, "and we had to have something."

Solution

In spite of Hi Fert's fully outsourced environment, there was no logical system within which Dunn could manage the service levels of Hi Fert's IT suppliers. He knew that driving user self service had been proven to reduce costs and improve customer service. He also knew that by providing his users with direct access to the data and forms they would need to interact with a new service desk, he could create a positive impact. It was clear the



John Dunn
IT Manager
Hi Fert Australia

Planwell Technology is a leading independent supplier of IT Service Management Solutions (ITSM). Planwell offers enterprise level process consulting using the ITIL framework and process automation using leading software solutions. Planwell carries such endorsements as ISO9001:2000 Quality Assurance along with a range of other accreditations. As a Business Service Management Certified partner of BMC Software, Planwell is certified as the leading channel to sell, implement and support BMC software solutions through its offices across Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines.

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Commercial in Confidence



Hi Fert



company needed the right software to improve financial performance, increase manageability, and help align IT with the rest of the organization.

Dunn knew there were some good service desk applications on the market, but most shared a high price tag. Nevertheless, his choice was reasonably easy. "I've been in the industry for 20 years and it's fairly easy to see BMC has the flagship set of products," he says. "BMC® Service Desk Express Suite is based on IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL®) best practices. It includes a configuration management database (CMDB); enables me to do incident, problem, and service level management; and comes at the right price. What's more, BMC also offers fully integrated change management, which becomes essential in managing the environmental changes that impact the users' ability to do their job, and client services, which drive down the load on my service desk enormously. BMC Service Desk software represented a smarter and better way for us to do things."

Four full-time service center agents answer the phones and broker any user and vendor support queries. "They do level-one analysis — getting more detail from the customer to enable the assignment of the call to the right provider," says Dunn. "Our hit-rate is now between 95 and 97 percent, and there's no requirement to reassign a call."

Within a couple of weeks of implementing the new service desk, there was a 70 percent drop in inbound call volumes, simply because Dunn had given his users a self-service capability. Still, it's critical for Dunn to ensure call resolution has been achieved. "My service desk makes contact with the user to seek their concurrence that the call is closed," he says.

Simple phone transactions, such as password reset, have been reduced from three points of contact (under the transition phase) to just one. "There's a whole series of lost work time savings through more efficient call-handling, and we're taking around 500 calls a month."

Another positive side-effect of the service desk implementation has been harnessing the accumulation of knowledge, says Dunn. "We've built a knowledge base into the system through the last six months of call-handling, and now our agents can see if somebody had this problem once before, and if so, how it was solved. They don't need to log a call; they solve it themselves, on the fly."

During the growing season, support is required 24-hour-a-day. In the first year of using BMC Service Desk Express Suite, Hi Fert has maintained a better than 96 percent systems availability. "In core systems, we've been up around the 98 percent mark," says Dunn, "and if we measure the number of 'touch points' a user has with IT, it's much diminished."

Key Products Used

- > BMC® Service Desk Express Suite
- > BMC® Service Desk Express Change Management
- > BMC® Service Desk Express Client Services

Complying With Health and Safety Regulations

Dunn needed to incorporate the Environmental Health & Safety component of Hi Fert's internal quality systems into BMC Service Desk Express Suite, and had originally been looking at an additional best-of-breed application to do so. However, it would have cost around A\$100,000 plus a further A\$100,000 for the implementation. "We did the whole thing in BMC Service Desk Express Suite for around A\$60,000, and now have a common interface."

Users can now look at the status of any incident, evaluate progress, and see who's dealing with it, Dunn explains. What's more, this isn't restricted to IT jobs. "If someone offsite has a concern that the stairs are unsafe, he can see that his manager has looked at it, that the carpenter has been called, that a quote has been provided, and that the stairs have been scheduled to be fixed the following week." Because this EH&S component uses a common interface and is part of the central incident management system, Hi Fert has no need to retrain people. What's more, Dunn has removed the traditional perception of incident management as being only about IT — Hi Fert's system manages incidents across the business. "We want to measure the successes we've had; whether it's some unsafe stairs or a PC that isn't working. Those are now measurable, and that's the ultimate management benefit: we have a common set of reports. We were able to integrate those extra requirements for A\$60,000 versus A\$200,000, so there's A\$140,000 savings without looking at any of the rest of the benefits."



Hi Fert implemented the BMC Service Desk Express Suite and BMC Service Desk Express Change Management components through Planwell Technology, a supplier of IT service management and customer support that offers application integration and full-service delivery.

Planwell supports a business service management (BSM) approach, and through its partnership with BMC, has carried out implementations for many local customers. "Planwell set everything up for us and installed the application. I'd have them back in here tomorrow if I had major work to do."

Dunn's challenge for the coming year is to open the service desk to Hi Fert's direct customers. "I need to become more nimble in my delivery, giving them B2C mechanisms and tools to connect to us." This will involve making it easier for them to inquire about prices. Offshore phosphate purchases are made in U.S. dollars, and so are affected by the exchange rate. "I need to make it easier for dealers to reach us to confirm the current price; transact their order

"As an IT manager, user satisfaction is very important to me. Also, in order to continue my craft, I need to know that my suppliers have done what they tell me they've done. BMC Service Desk Express Suite provides me with both of those mechanisms — to see calls coming in, including the agent assigned to work the incident, and determine whether the vendors have met their commitment to respond to those calls in a timely manner. Metrics are built upon the severity of the impact."

John Dunn
IT Manager
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Hi Fert



in the system; and get the truck to our plant to pick up the product. That would mean our service desk would go from servicing 170 people to servicing 4,000 dealers.”

Customers Perspective

“As an IT manager, user satisfaction is very important to me,” says Dunn. “Also, in order to continue my craft, I need to know that my suppliers have done what they tell me they’ve done.

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Dunn is now working on improving call turn-around and honing the content of Hi Fert’s knowledge base to provide even better user self-service and a higher degree of first-call resolution. He hopes to reduce the current rate of 500 calls a month to 400 by the end of 2007, while also reducing the number of service desk staff. “BMC Service Desk Express Suite will be the key to delivering those efficiencies,” he says.

Whenever the drought comes, Hi Fert’s service desk will be ready to handle the support calls.

Business Need

Hi Fert was looking to implement an ITIL-based single-point-of-contact service desk (where previously none existed) that would comply with environmental health and occupational safety regulations, while also providing bandwidth-friendly, Web-based access to remote sites with poor connectivity.

Solution

By implementing BMC Service Desk Express Suite, including the Change Management and Client Services modules, the company centralized its incident, problem, change, and service level management processes, thus improving customer satisfaction and streamlining IT efficiencies.

- A \$400,000 savings on an outsourcing contract
- Rapid implementation
- Single point of contact for IT and the business to handle both Environmental
- Health and Safety (EH&S) issues, as well as customer complaints
- Improved service to remote sites
- Reduction in the number of user “touch points” with IT
- Increase in user satisfaction survey ratings from 2 to 3.87 (scored out of 5)

About Hi Fert High Analysis Fertilizers Pty Ltd

Hi Fert is a leader in the Australian fertilizer industry. Its goal is to give Australian farmers “the growing edge,” and its high-analysis fertilizer products and patented coating technology have changed the way farmers manage their crop and pasture nutrition. Farmers using Hi Fert products can order customized fertilizer blends to meet their exact nutrient requirements. The company has a dedicated dealer and distribution network, with sales specialists and agronomists using local knowledge to ensure a farmer’s specific fertilizer needs are met. It has annual revenue of A\$600 million.

Results

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