

Saint-Gobain Containers Retools Portal

Container company migrates to IBM WebSphere on IBM System i

♦ Challenge

Worldwide corporation Saint-Gobain® standardizes on an integrated, manageable, and standards-based portal solution to meet increasing user demands. Saint-Gobain Containers, a subsidiary of Saint-Gobain, is tasked with implementing this "open standards" approach to portal technology, with a preference of Java™ and J2EE™ over other languages and standards.

♦ Solution

Migrate from existing portal solution to IBM® WebSphere® Portal running on IBM System i™ server. This allows Saint-Gobain Containers to utilize open source projects and expand its range of skills, providing increased flexibility and productivity with employees, customers, and vendors.

♦ Key Benefits

- Efficient vehicle for presentation of data across all the companies
- Extensive repository of organized information
- Centralized portal for employees (launch pad of all applications and databases)
- Improved business process management, collaboration, personalization, and customization
- Increased OS, Web Server, and pervasive device support
- Improved Java, security, single sign-on functionality and support
- Tighter integration with: ERP/Legacy applications, add-ons, and site analysis
- Increased integration with Sametime
- Improved campaign management, content management, collaborative tools, instant messaging, and internationalization.

♦ Key Components

- IBM System i5™ Model 570
- IBM WebSphere Portal Extend
- Sirius Solution Services
- IBM Global Financing



With fourteen plants and one distribution center in the U.S., Saint-Gobain Containers is a leading producer of glass packaging for the food and beverage industries and a major user of recycled glass. Saint-Gobain Containers produces billions of glass containers annually. Everything from apple juice and wine to cheese and pickles are sold in Saint-Gobain Containers' jars and bottles. Saint-Gobain Containers employs more than 4,400 people and focuses solely on glass packaging.

Parent company, Compagnie de Saint-Gobain, is a worldwide producer, processor and distributor of materials with operations in more than fifty countries. Compagnie de Saint-Gobain fields a workforce of over 200,000 in total and is a world leader in each of its competencies.

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Central to the company's success is its ability to communicate across boundaries and among business units, share information, and efficiently manage a growing amount of company data. Two years ago, Saint-Gobain Containers was responsible for implementing and hosting an employee-based Portal on a different software technology platform. While the project succeeded in several key objectives (most importantly getting employees committed to the concept of a portal to share information, collaborate, and launch corporate applications), both the portal server market and the company's requirements changed.

"There were several contributing factors that led to our parent company's decision to standardize on IBM WebSphere Portal," said Mike Crump, Manager, Computing Services, Saint-Gobain Containers. "We've embraced that decision and have led our transition by implementing WebSphere Portal Extend in a partition on our IBM System i5 570."

Saint-Gobain Containers and Sirius lead implementation of new employee portal

Saint-Gobain Containers contracted the skills of Sirius WebSphere and Lotus consultants to create a strategic roadmap that would help Saint-Gobain Containers get from the existing portal environment to the WebSphere Portal environment as quickly as possible.

"Sirius was thoroughly involved in the move to WebSphere Portal," said Tom Kinghorn, Manager, Decision Support Systems, Saint-Gobain Containers. "They understood our objectives and the products, resulting in a very efficient migration."

Sirius provided Saint-Gobain Containers with a documented review of the existing portal technology infrastructure, skills, application requirements and recommended roadmap to meet current and future portal application requirements. The roadmap ensured that the project team would adhere to corporate mandates and leverage existing assets while using proven best practices.

Swift migration eases end-user transition period

While there is rarely a convenient time to make major application changes, time was critical because the employees depended on the portal and required enhanced functionality. Saint-Gobain Containers needed to continue investing and developing functionality in the existing environment until WebSphere reached production level. When WebSphere Portal functionality equaled that of the existing environment, the project team focused solely on WebSphere Portal. The time spent working in both environments simultaneously was minimized to only a few weeks, saving Saint-Gobain considerable time, effort and money.

"We successfully migrated the entire environment to WebSphere Portal in under four months," said Crump. "A huge reason for the expedience and success of this migration project can be attributed to the Sirius consultants. Even with an extremely aggressive timeline and high expectations of increased functionality, we've met our deadlines and the users are seeing huge benefits in usability and function."

IBM System i proves to be a good solution for WebSphere Portal

WebSphere Portal can run in many different operating environments. The parent company is implementing WebSphere Portal on a UNIX server, and Saint-Gobain Containers opted to upgrade an existing iSeries to a System i5 570 and create a partition for Portal.

"The iSeries, or now System i, has some significant value propositions for us," said Crump. "It has proven to be highly reliable, with virtually no downtime. Application deployment is simple and efficient. The operating system updates are extensively tested and easily implemented. And, we've recently benefited from the JVM on the System i5 in regards to performance."

The System i5 JVM has unique features:

- The process of garbage collection does not force all threads in the JVM to stop until garbage collection is finished.
- The memory used for the java heap is easy to manage and maintained efficiently in the System i5.

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In addition to inherent benefits in the System i5, Saint-Gobain Containers has extensive expertise in administration and maintenance of the System i5 platform and those skills are being leveraged. It's important to consider what skills exist when choosing the right platform for a portal environment.

New portal supports strategic corporate initiatives

Moving more than 1,000 employees to a new portal foundation is a major undertaking. Saint-Gobain Containers and the parent company both anticipated significant returns from the investment - measured in both savings and additional functionality.

"I look at the differences in two areas: front end, what our users experience, and back end, what it costs us to provide the portal to the employees," said Crump. "In both areas, we've improved by moving to WebSphere Portal on System i5."

User benefits:

Centralized repository for corporate data (all data resides on System i5)

The data from all corporate applications is integrated into the data warehouse and accessed real time via the portal. Data sources include sales (by region, by date and soon by business unit), customer service, inventory (by plant and customer), A/R, all financial data, and manufacturing data.

Launch pad for all applications

Links to applications, general corporate links, and common bookmarks for enterprise applications are all prominently available on the portal, which eases navigation and increases productivity. This gives the users a more browser-based client and the project team is now working on single sign-on, with one id/pw for all applications.

Integration with Sametime

Employees are constantly aware of others on the system - whether in e-mail or on the portal or in one of the many corporate applications. Lotus® Sametime® is built throughout the

systems so that instant messaging and file sharing has increased dramatically, which in turn has increased productivity and collaboration.

Enhanced file serving

"A huge change has occurred for us since we recognized the need to restrict user e-mail volume with regards to attachment size," said Crump. "The result is a better solution for sharing data with an easy-to-use front end that's in the portal. We're saving on disk space and increasing collaboration."

New newsletter capabilities

One of the most significant benefits to employees is the ability to create, maintain, and read the e-containers Newsletter, a corporate newsletter for Saint-Gobain Containers salaried employees. The newsletter is published every two months using IBM Workplace Web Content Management™, (part of WebSphere Portal 5.1). Non-IT staff members create and maintain the newsletter. Sirius created a Saint-Gobain html newsletter theme, and all departments contribute to the newsletter, including groups such as Human Resources, Technology, Strategic Development, Finance and Information Technology. The e-containers Newsletter allows the different groups in the company to communicate strategic information to the entire company easily and very effectively.

IT benefits:

"The benefits to our IT team have turned out to be significant," said Kinghorn. "WebSphere, Lotus and the System i are a good fit for our environment and our skill sets. Plus, we are now managing one server rather than six."

Fast deployment of new portal

Both WebSphere Portal and the System i5 provided the ability to implement an improved portal environment in only four months. Saint-Gobain Containers is now focused on increasing the functionality.

Decreased costs

By decreasing the number of servers and eliminating additional database licenses, Saint-Gobain Containers moved from six servers to one quarter of the System i5 and eliminated the need to pay for an additional server and extra database licenses.

Increased utilization

Resources on the System i5, such as processors, memory and disk, are dynamically allocated to the Portal application (as well as the corporate ERP and financial applications). "We are moving resources, taking down logical resources when we need to instead of affecting the entire server, and letting the system adjust automatically too," said Crump. "This technology is meant to solve real business problems, and that's what it's doing for us."

Adherence to industry standards

Using JAVA and J2EE ensures that Saint-Gobain has a solution that will port to multiple platforms, can tap into skills that are available in the marketplace, and will follow the leading technology trends when new features are developed.

Easier management of the Portal environment

"As it turns out, WebSphere Portal is actually easier to manage," said Crump. Organizing data with a Web interface, creating custom menus and portlets, accessing data, and administering the system are straightforward tasks in WebSphere Portal. The infrastructure is simplified as well. The previous portal solution required six separate servers; Portal runs on partitions on one System i server.

Maximized IT resources

Saint-Gobain Containers maintains lean IT staff levels. With WebSphere Portal running on the System i5, Saint-Gobain Containers can now do significantly more portal work to ensure that the technology is truly meeting the needs of the business and providing a return on the investment.

Availability of custom and native portlets

To increase usability of the portal, Sirius has written a number of custom portlets, including:

- A file portlet that allows users to manage their file server with greater organization and security and the ability to drill down into directories
- A graphing portlet that displays data warehouse information for users

In addition to custom portlets, Saint-Gobain Containers has taken advantage of the WebSphere Portlet Factory. As an example, out of the box Sametime Connectivity portlets provide the constant awareness, instant messaging and file sharing capabilities.

The migration to WebSphere Portal running on Saint-Gobain Containers' System i server has provided the company with a flexible, manageable portal environment for employees.

"Everyone has a different viewpoint about exactly what a portal is and why it's a good thing," said Crump. "But moving to WebSphere has definitely improved the user experience, provided greater functionality, and improved manageability across all teams involved."

For more information:

Please contact your Sirius Account Executive or visit our Web site at: www.siriuscom.com



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