

Unlock insights on any data

Customer Solution Case Study



Manufacturing a New Path to Profit and Productivity

Customer: Albany International Corp.

Website: www.albint.com

Customer Size: 4,100 employees

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Manufacturing, Aerospace

Partner: Simplement

Website: www.simplement.us/

Customer Profile

Albany International, based in Rochester, New Hampshire, is a global advanced textiles and materials processing company.

Software and Services

- Microsoft Server Product Portfolio
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2014
- Microsoft Office
 - Microsoft Power BI for Office 365
 - Microsoft Power View for Excel 2013
 - Microsoft Power View for SharePoint 2013
 - Simplement Data Liberator Platform
 - Data Simplification Tools
 - Simplement Services for Deployment/SAP expertise

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Dawne Wimbrow, Vice President and CIO, Albany International

As the world's leading producer of custom-designed fabrics and belts essential to production in the paper, nonwovens, and other process industries, Albany International Corp. knows what it takes to succeed globally. Now, using new data analysis tools that help decision-makers better measure profitability, the company has even more in-depth knowledge about its products and can find new ways to be competitive.

Business Needs

Albany International's Paper Machine Clothing business leads the competition with a global market share of approximately 30 percent. Albany also has a growing Engineered Composites division, which produces a number of highly engineered components for aircraft, including 3D woven blades for the CFM* LEAP engine.

But for all its business success, the company had a big challenge: it didn't have an easy way to determine how much money some of its products were making. "We make and sell products all over the world, and for some of them, it was very difficult to measure the profitability," says Dawne Wimbrow, Vice President and CIO, Albany International.

That was a major roadblock for a company that, like all enterprises, is striving to find new ways to increase profits.

The company's struggle to view profitability data was related to the complexity of its engineered-to-order products along with its SAP Business Warehouse (BW) system, which it tried to use to get better business intelligence (BI) reporting and analysis. "SAP BW is more of a reporting tool and not the true business intelligence and data discovery technology that we needed to explore product profitability and other critical information," says Wimbrow.

Albany also relied on manual processes to find that information. "Our analysts would

spend a tremendous amount of time developing models and looking at SAP BW reports, just to get profitability data for one or two products," Wimbrow says. "It took many hours of data analysis across millions of transactions to get any insight."

To Wimbrow and others at Albany, it was clear that there was an urgent need for better BI. "We had a real business need—to find new ways to increase profits—but we didn't know how to address that with the tools we had," she says.

A Powerful New Reporting Tool

Albany considered deploying another SAP BI system to solve its challenge, but quickly decided against the idea. "From a licensing and cost perspective, it was just too big of a pill for us to swallow," says Barry Duncan, Vice President of IT, Albany International. "We thought there had to be a better way to go about this."

The company's search led it directly to Microsoft. "We have a large Microsoft stack here, and when there is an alignment between technology and our business needs, we continue to push for new Microsoft technologies," says Duncan. "In this case, we approached Microsoft and told them about our BI struggles," Duncan says. Microsoft introduced Albany to Simplement, a Microsoft partner and provider of BI solutions that integrate with SAP systems. "We had actually evaluated Simplement earlier," Duncan says. "When Microsoft brought them back to the table, everything started clicking for us."

In this case, Albany was interested in a solution that combines new Microsoft BI technologies with the new Simplement Data Liberator Platform, running on SQL Server 2012 or 2014.

Albany decided to test the solution using its product profitability data. "We thought we should start with one of our more difficult challenges," says Wimbrow. Using familiar Microsoft BI tools, including Microsoft

Power View in Microsoft Excel 2013 and Power View in Microsoft SharePoint 2013, select Albany employees in Europe and the United States are now able to get new profitability insights from the company's SQL Server 2014 data warehouse. This warehouse includes SAP ECC data liberated by Simplement.

Dashboard Delivery

Sales, manufacturing and financial data from the Albany SAP ECC system moves through the Simplement data layer and is presented via dashboards in Power View through role-based security. The dashboards provide simple, real-time snapshots of complex manufacturing metrics such as the number of products shipped per week or month and the number of kilos of product produced by plant or by product for both the company's business divisions. "Getting those kinds of numbers used to take people many hours each week, because they had to compile different SAP BW reports and email them to senior managers," Wimbrow says.

Data Insights in Seconds

Albany employees using the Microsoft and Simplement solution can perform easy modeling of SAP data in near real time, instead of the hours it took previously. "Getting profitability data before was a difficult, time-consuming process that could only be done a couple of times per year," Wimbrow says. "Now, the data modeling is fluid and faster than anything we've had before." The company now has a complete view of profitability, which it never had before due to the complexity of the process.

Finding New Ways to Grow Profits

Product and sales managers at Albany now have new, in-depth visibility into the profitability of many of the organization's products worldwide. "The Microsoft and Simplement Gross Profitability tool reveals things we wouldn't have otherwise known about our product profitability," says

Wimbrow. "This tool exposes our SAP data in new and valuable ways, so we can understand the profitability impact for decisions on product selection, manufacturing sites, and where our customers are located."

As an example, the company is using its new solution to help its composites division look at the business differently. "The financial analysts in the composites business are starting to segment the business, and they're managing legacy programs separately from new initiatives. With this solution, they are building profitability reports for each of those programs," says Wimbrow. Armed with that sort of data, analysts can more easily determine which programs are performing well and which need more resources.

In addition, analysts who use the manufacturing metrics dashboards can make faster, more-informed business decisions and create new strategies to boost profitability.

Taking Advantage of Existing Skills, Driving for Performance

The company is also able to use its existing internal IT skills, because the new solution integrates seamlessly with the Albany Microsoft technology stack. "We have more people capable of working with data using Microsoft BI tools than we do people with SAP BW skills," says Duncan. "So we can get more out of our data using the people we already have here, with no need for additional training."

Looking ahead, Albany plans to take advantage of the in-memory capabilities in Microsoft SQL Server 2014 to drive higher performance in its Microsoft and Simplement solution. For example, while Albany already has SAP data automatically moving into its SQL Server/Simplement relational data store and into SharePoint for real-time reports, the organization is looking at automating the data going from the relational store into a SQL Server

Analysis Services tabular environment, so it could be available in memory and in near real time. “Even if we can use that technology to get a report to run in two seconds instead of 10, that’s still a win,” says Duncan. “That could be especially valuable for our sales team, because it could give them have instant visibility of order, inventory, and product information.”

With the success of the project to date, the company sees the road map to modern, flexible reporting that will reduce demand for ABAP, extractors, and other time-consuming and expensive processes for maintaining the SAP BW landscape.

Realizing the Promise of SAP

For Albany, one of the big wins of its new BI solution is proving the value of its SAP deployment. “This solution helps us deliver on the promise of SAP by getting such great business value out of it,” says Wimbrow.

And as Albany continues to get value from its SAP systems, it expects to discover even more insight from its SAP data. “We can ask the ‘what if?’ questions of our data now, and we can make strategic decisions about where we want our business to go,” says Duncan. “When the CEO is using our BI solution himself to find new business trends, then that is a very powerful tool.”

*CFM International is a 50/50 joint company of GE and Snecma (Safran).