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Chris Strain, IS Manager, Ahaus



Ahaus Tool and Engineering Inc.

Ahaus Tool and Engineering Boosts Productivity With Made2Manage SQL

Craftsmanship, quality and innovation have been the watchwords at Ahaus Tool and Engineering Inc., Richmond, Indiana, for more than 50 years. From its 65,000 square-foot manufacturing facility, the company provides conventional tooling, cutting-edge technologies for special machine



applications, and full turnkey design and build services. Ahaus' dedication to quality has earned consistent ISO 9001 registration since 1996 and QS 9000-TE registration since 1999. This commitment to excellence has helped Ahaus win the confidence and loyalty of manufacturing giants such as Ford, Chrysler, Honda, Valeo, Westinghouse, Lexmark and others.

To ensure consistently high quality manufacturing processes and maintain a competitive advantage, Ahaus strives for quality and peak performance throughout its organization. To achieve this, Ahaus implemented the Made2Manage[®] Enterprise Business

System in January 2000, to control and track customer orders throughout the entire process from the initial order, to the shop floor, and finally to invoicing and payment. However, as the company grew, it became apparent that the Visual FoxPro (VFP) database of the Made2Manage system could not keep up with the greatly expanding database of customers and system users. While state of the art when first purchased, the VFP database was showing its limitations when compared to the robust capabilities of the newer SQL database. Productivity levels were dropping as users throughout the organization could not access the Made2Manage system during necessary database repairs and maintenance.

Database Challenges

"The number one issue we were dealing with was the constant corruption of database headers and tables, which is a common flaw in the Visual FoxPro infrastructure," says Chris Strain, IS manager at Ahaus. "If users unknowingly tried to access and save the same data in the same tables or records at the same time, corrupted data would result. We'd have to kick everyone out of the Made2Manage system and then take several hours to identify the corrupt records, correct them and restore the data to the system."

According to Strain, system maintenance was required about once a week, and the consistent disruption of workflow had bottom line consequences.

Ahaus Controller Bob Covington adds that IS users weren't the only ones affected by the limitations of Visual FoxPro. "With Made2Manage integrated throughout our business, a lot of people can't do their jobs if they can't access it," Covington says. "What's



more, data integrity became an issue. If a program doesn't work the way it's supposed to, it creates doubts in the users' minds. With SQL, the data stays in sync with the other tables, and if the data is in SQL you can pretty much believe it."

Building for the Future With SQL

To remedy its system downtime woes brought about by inadequacies in Visual FoxPro, Ahaus upgraded to the Made2Manage SQL version in December 2000. The migration from Visual FoxPro to SQL took four weeks, and Ahaus was able to realize tangible return on investment within only two months. "With the new Made2Manage SQL version, header corruption is a thing of the past and system downtime is virtually non-existent," says Strain. "Downtime has been cut from up to three hours per week down to zero."

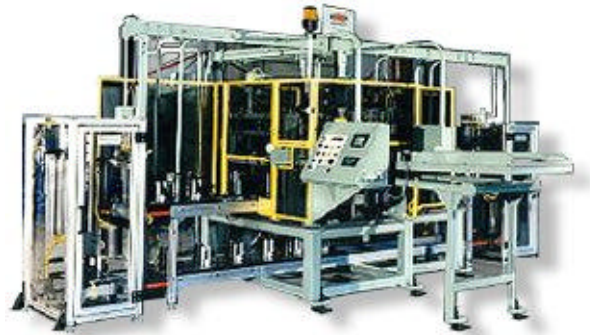


Strain also notes that integrating database information with other components of the Made2Manage system is much easier using SQL. "For example, we have a materials report that includes some custom tables. Visual FoxPro required that the tables be created and kept within the same database, but SQL allows us to use custom tables created outside the Made2Manage system and export them without a problem," says Strain.

Covington notes that a key benefit of using SQL is that a query analyzer is built right into the system. "The query analyzer function is a great way for system administrators to perform ad hoc queries of Made2Manage data to retrieve data that would be almost impossible to access in the old Visual FoxPro version," Covington says. "Also, the SQL enterprise manager function lets users go in and manipulate tables in a very friendly graphical environment. You can see what you're doing to the tables before finalizing the changes and that's very beneficial."

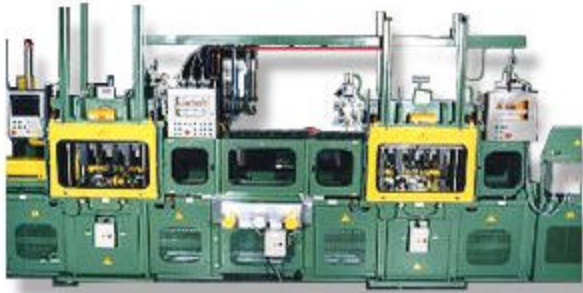
According to Covington, the ability to use Crystal Reports within the new Made2Manage SQL version is another key benefit. "We use Crystal Reports to create reports that are customized to the way we want to view the data, and the Made2Manage SQL version lets us do that easily without customizing the system," says Covington.

The ability to easily upgrade and add new product capabilities to the Made2Manage system makes the SQL version a very attractive choice. Made2Manage Product Marketing Manager Abby O'Keeffe explains that Visual FoxPro was state of the art when it was written, but the newer technology inherent in SQL enables Made2Manage to more readily develop new products for the system. "The SQL server has the capabilities to handle Made2Manage's business analytics, OLAP cubes and data mining applications," O'Keeffe says. "We have been able to create this kind of functionality for the Made2Manage system because of the SQL technology."



Planning for a Successful Migration

According to Strain, careful planning and consultation with Made2Manage technical staff were key to ensuring a successful migration from Visual FoxPro to the new Made2Manage SQL version at Ahaus. "Migrating to SQL is not for the novice system administrator because of the complexity of the product," Strain says. "Once SQL is up and running it is maintenance free for the most part, but it's important to have someone on your staff who is very familiar with SQL during the migration. If



problems arise, you need someone who can identify which elements are FoxPro and which ones are SQL. We also took advantage of systems optimization assistance from Made2Manage. They were with us throughout the beta testing to ensure that the FoxPro data was error free before migration."

O'Keeffe agrees that expert help is a "must" when setting up SQL server. "SQL server settings must be precise, and companies need to get it right the first

time to avoid problems after going live," O'Keeffe says. "Made2Manage technical consultants can go on-site to help with the migration, plus we give our customers access to the M2M Expert Web site. While there, they can click on a tab that takes them to a page with answers to typical questions about migrating to SQL—what kind of hardware is required, how to set up a migration timeline and other issues."

Because SQL is a very server-intensive application, Made2Manage recommends a high-end 700 MHz or greater server with a dual processor dedicated to the SQL application. Made2Manage also recommends that companies use very high-speed redundant disk arrays. In addition, the SQL server must be expandable to allow the addition of another CPU, more RAM or additional disk arrays in the future.

Downtime and Disruptions Eliminated With SQL

One of the biggest benefits of the new Made2Manage SQL version at Ahaus is the consistent stability of the system. Since its implementation in December 2000, the system has delivered peak performance with no instances of downtime. If problems do arise, however, Strain and his IS staff can now handle them in just minutes as opposed to many hours.

"From a data integrity standpoint, I can restore the SQL database within 15 minutes of corruption," Strain says. "With Visual FoxPro, I could lose an entire day."

Covington notes that there is an even greater benefit to consider. "One of the best things is that we have not yet had to restore data since the SQL version went live," Covington says. "The stability of SQL is awesome. We're very happy with the migration to the Made2Manage SQL version and we'd definitely do it again."



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