

Success Story

Milestone in the digital journey

The global Swiss technology company Bühler, headquartered in Uzwil (SG), has taken an important step forward in its digital transformation journey. The Group has successfully converted its global ERP software to SAP S/4HANA. With this, the Bühler Group laid the foundation for new digital applications for corporate management.



The Bühler Group migrated its global ERP to SAP S/4HANA with Swisscom as its experienced SAP partner. Today, Bühler uses the latest SAP technology and has mainly used the project to adapt its financial structures. SAP S/4HANA enables the technology group to tap the potential of cutting-edge digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to assist with business management and to implement the vision of smart manufacturing step by step: the efficient networking of people, systems, machines, products and companies along the entire value chain.

Initial situation

Every day, two billion people enjoy food produced with Bühler machines, and one billion people use vehicles equipped with Bühler technology. The family-owned company began its collaboration with SAP almost five decades ago, introducing SAP R/1 in 1978 and SAP R/2 in 1979. In 1998, the company switched to SAP R/3 through what is known as a greenfield approach – a completely new implementation that enabled the company to redesign systems and work processes from scratch. Since then, this system has been at the heart of all operational processes and global implementations.

Part of the digitalisation strategy

Before migrating to S/4HANA, Bühler operated 80% of its sales on a global single-client system with more than 80 peripheral systems. It comprised more than 30 companies with more than 8,000 users and managed, among other things, 2,500 customer projects, more than 100,000 service orders, 2.6 million manufacturing orders, 2.2 million orders and 160,000 deliveries annually. As part of its digitalisation strategy, Bühler planned to update its global ERP. The timing seemed favourable, as the current solution was gradually reaching the end of its service life.



Two billion people enjoy food produced with Bühler machines every day.

Objective

‘We aimed to develop a state-of-the-art system to prepare ourselves for the digital challenges of the future,’ explains Markus Suter, Head of Business Processes & Applications at Bühler. The financial sector in particular hoped to optimise its business processes as a result. ‘In addition, the structures in the system that have grown over two decades needed to be cleaned up in order to increase transparency,’ explains Marilena Jemetta-Sammartin, Head of Global Finance Academy & CH Accounting at Bühler Group. Scalability and harmonisation were only partially achieved. The main objective of the new software was therefore to create a high-performance data source that all employees worldwide could access.

Selective data transition

For Bühler, it was important that the introduction of the new ERP system proceeded as smoothly as possible, without major changes in business processes. The scope of the project was carefully defined in order to support the digitalisation strategy in the best possible way, while also ensuring that the schedule and stability of business operations

were guaranteed at all times during the go-live. The challenge was therefore to minimise the complexity, the duration of the project and the associated costs. This required a strategic approach and careful planning.



Large amounts of data
Bühler needed a high-performance data source.

Solution

Bühler made the strategic decision to migrate its global ERP system to SAP S/4HANA and selected Swisscom (Switzerland) Ltd as its project partner due to its many years of expertise and the method of implementation. It was implemented using selective data transition, which offered the possibility of maintaining existing processes and transforming certain data, as well as making the go-live phase flexible.

Detailed migration planning

Planning for the migration was extremely meticulous. The selective migration made it possible to reorganise the organisational structure and adapt the profit centre structures. The biggest challenge was to integrate the new system into the finance department. Bühler optimised the global account structure and at the same time introduced the new general ledger, the universal journal, as well as the division of financial statements by profit centre. This required thorough training of employees, which was successfully carried out by the company's Finance Academy and the ITP Academy. The smooth data migration was ensured by SNP, a subcontractor of Swisscom. An important insight emerged during the process of changing the system: in the hot phase, which began nine months before the go-live and continued until three months after, the focus was solely on the successful implementation of the new core system. This involved not only migrating the new SAP S/4HANA core system, but also adapting the existing peripheral systems, which included the SAP applications E-Commerce, Integrated Business

Planning (IBP), Field Service Management (FSM), Extended Warehouse Management (EWM), Manufacturing Execution (ME), Business Warehouse (BW) and Human Resources (HR). 'The focus was on successfully migrating the ERP first without simultaneously pushing ahead with further optimisations or ongoing projects and innovation plans,' Suter emphasises. The transformation phase was completed within 17 months, and the go-live went smoothly on 15 August 2022.

'With SAP S/4HANA, we are equipped to deal with the digital challenges of the future.'

Markus Suter

Head of Business Processes & Applications

Benefits

The Bühler Group started worldwide with a stable system that supported the operational processes smoothly from the outset. Thanks to selective data transformation, the original data volume of 7 terabytes has been reduced by more than half. This contributed significantly to the optimisation of investments in the in-memory databases, as Suter explains. With SAP S/4HANA, the company now has a state-of-the-art backbone for its business processes that enables real-time data and fast reporting, as well as seamless, automated processes. Suter also adds: 'We now need to identify and optimise the relevant aspects in each business division, step by step.'

Digital transformation journey continues

Although the new ERP system is crucial, it is only one component of Bühler's comprehensive digitalisation strategy. This strategic decision enables the technology group to exploit the potential of cutting-edge digital technologies such as artificial intelligence

and machine learning to manage the Group. This includes the implementation of smart factories, the provision of a smart customer experience and, above all, the transformation into a data-driven enterprise.

Global team spirit essential

A company typically experiences a transformation project of this magnitude only once in its history. A decisive success factor was the extraordinary commitment of all those involved, from the management to the employees. Jemetta-Sammartin is thrilled: 'This project manifested the impressive Bühler spirit, the passion and the common will of employees around the world to achieve something great.' Suter adds: 'The last five days before the go-live felt like we were preparing for a NASA rocket launch.' On the decisive test day, which was the Sunday, employees from Switzerland to China sat in front of their screens, and Bühler management was also present on site.



Marilena Jemetta-Sammartin and Markus Suter supervised the Bühler Group IT project from the very beginning.

‘The joy we felt on Sunday afternoon, when everything was running smoothly, was simply indescribable.’

Marilena Jemetta-Sammartin
Head of Global Finance Academy & CH Accounting

In this context, CIO Vidor Kapy emphasises the close collaboration between Bühler and its project partner Swisscom, which was crucial to the success of the transformation. The teamwork between the parties was exceptional and was ensured by Swisscom’s strong presence on site two to three days a week. During the cutover on Saturday morning, there was a significant slowdown during the import of S/4HANA. Kapy says: ‘Even in this moment of horror, our team didn’t fall apart at the seams. On the contrary, each party made an important contribution to finding a solution. In the end, we were even able to hand over the system to operations 15 minutes before the planned go-live.’

About Bühler AG

- Sector: plant engineering
- Employees: 12,700 worldwide
- Users: more than 8,000



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