SLIMS – A study in long term support and development

The Ships Logistic Information Management System, "SLIMS" went live on HMAS Success on the 2nd of February 1988, over 23 years ago and is still in use today on the ship.

SLIMS was a custom development by MWA for the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) to meet its then ILS / supply system needs, using technologies available at the time.

When SLIMS went live it was written using the 4GL Dataflex and its proprietary ISAM (non SQL) database as a pure "fat" client side application - non client server. SLIMS was the first RAN ship board LAN + PC application.

From the start SLIMS has constantly evolved and expanded to meet the changing defence requirements and was used in a number of unexpected roles, such as when the Army originally deployed to Afghanistan.

The ongoing support and updates by MWA allowed SLIMS to adopt modern technologies as they became available or as required by the RAN's evolving technology standards.

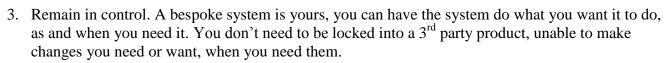The major SLIMS development points were as follows:

- SLIMS was delivered by MWA in late 1987 as a DOS text based, client application running in the defence Novell LAN environment.

- Early 1990's saw the additions to support multiple accounting units, electronic communication flows with the central defence supply system (SDSS) and enhanced user reporting functions.

- In 1998 SLIMS moved to client server architecture using the Novell Btrieve database server.

- In 2002 as defence converted from Novell to Windows, SLIMS was converted to Microsoft SQL Server while keeping the Dataflex 4GL client environment.

- In 2006 MWA was requested to move SLIMS to a full windows style GUI application while keeping all existing SLIMS design concepts, screen layouts, logic flows, function keys, etc. MWA kept the MS SQL database server, split the business and data logic between the new IIS web server and SQL database and delivered this major system upgrade in under a year. The web based version was rolled out through the fleet in 2007.

- In 2010 SLIMS reporting functions were converted from Crystal reports to Microsoft Reporting Services when Crystal was being phased out by Defence.

- Global visibility was added in 2011. Each ship can now see what all other SLIMS ships hold in stock and on order. In addition a central fleet visibility module within the defence restricted LAN gives an ashore view of all stock balances and a complete transaction history for each SLIMS site.

All major technology upgrades have been typically completed and delivered by MWA in under a year from the RAN request. Lesser changes to business logic and adding new functionality are typically delivered by MWA within days, weeks or a few months.

MWA has provided and supported SLIMS for over 23 years, giving Defence a system that does what it is required to do at the time, using the Defence preferred technologies, giving Defence a state of the art system today, even though it was originally built in the late 1980's.

The lessons:

1. Support is long term: Use a provider that delivers great support, has a can do attitude and always strives to meet the client's needs.

2. Keep the system current: You don't need to replace your systems when the business or technology changes every few years. You can have your own design and keep the system up to date at a fraction of the cost of a redevelopment / change over projects.

3. Remain in control. A bespoke system is yours, you can have the system do what you want it to do, as and when you need it. You don't need to be locked into a 3rd party product, unable to make changes you need or want, when you need them.

4. Team structure and experience is critical. In software development a small, focused and knowledgeable "surgical team" can consistently produce more and deliver better results in less time than a large and less cohesive team or organisation. You can't just grab people and make a team that works and delivers great products and support – it takes a long time and staff stability. Then once you have them don't loose them.

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