



Unique solution serves all

At the end of last year Dutch-based Business Lease Group finalised the implementation of the Bynx vehicle leasing and fleet management system across their European operations. From that moment all Business Lease countries operated on the same software platform. Eric van Kessel, Business Lease ICT Director, speaks to Nic Evans about their success.

“They say it’s a Dutch habit that if we think something is very good we export it immediately.” says Eric van Kessel, ICT Director of Business Lease. “All our over 35,000 car lease contracts across Europe are managed with the support of one unique ICT platform.”

Business Lease, established in 1989, is the seventh largest Operational Leasing company in the Netherlands, and unique as an independent leasing company not owned by a Bank or Car manufacturer. “In 1996 we decided to make the jump to Central Europe where Business Lease is now considered as one of the pioneers in Operational Car Leasing in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland..”

But success can also have a back side. As a result of its successful quality approach in 2000 the Dutch business had grown from five thousand to ten thousand lease contracts and had reached the limits of their in-house system. In addition Business Lease was facing the move to the Euro which their system could not manage. In searching for a solution to maintain quality and continue the growth in the Netherlands business they looked beyond local software suppliers and partnered with Bynx, a successful new technology player in the vehicle leasing market from the UK.

In 2005, shortly after Eric joined Business Lease, “We put our current processes on paper and saw how we could standardise these. Until that moment each country business had their own systems: Our company in the Czech Republic used a modified version of Navision

small business accounting software with Slovakia using a different implementation of Navision and in Poland we had developed our own system but each country having its own IT department was not cost effective. Therefore we decided to centralise servers and IT services.”

Bynx technology helped the multi-national deployment. “Citrix and PowerFuse allowed us to have all countries running off same platform. Bynx was state of the art with a rich windows-like client. Running on an Oracle database and Unix gave us a secure, robust and scalable solution”.

Eric’s team took a country by country approach to their deployment across Central Europe. “Although you face many different situations in each country, our basic strategy was always leading and looking back this was a good approach because it gave us a manageable introduction of the business harmonisation. If you are the losing IT departments in each country the impact for the local operation is big and requires a different approach. Although it’s never easy you can persuade most of the time people by showing them the benefits. The first country is the hardest – after that it gets easier because you already know where the pitfalls are likely to be.”

“We started on Czech business with the largest volumes – and the biggest benefits. Their old system was no longer supported. They had, for example, processes to produce invoices every month that were costing three people each two or three days full-time work.

After that we went to Hungary which was just starting operations so they were on Bynx right from the start. The implementation time decreased for each country. Czech Republic took us sixteen months. By the time we got to our last country in a row, Poland, it was only 6 months. And where we had to cover 25 gaps in the first country - because of significant differences in the business processes between Western Europe and Central Europe – the following countries benefited from this – so with Poland remained only 3 gaps. Bynx supported us on the gap analysis and we had a close contact with Bynx on the way things were developed in such a way that we can reuse it in other countries – sometimes only a little bit differently.”

“The cooperation between Bynx and Business Lease was a critical success factor with a dedicated team at Bynx who knew our system and the business. The cooperation was good and the relationship very stable.

Business Lease stands out from the crowd delivering “Better Care” to its customers. Therefore it needs to rely on the best services supported by the right processes and a stable ICT software platform. IT is for us a strategic element and not a cost issue. As IT director I’m member of the board of BL Group and as such reporting to the CEO. This makes the IT strategy a core strategy, an important pillar in the overall strategy. And we are living up to it. We knew up front that it was not going to be done within two years and we accepted it because it required time to get it right. In 2009 we reached our goal.”

“One of the big benefits, that was less expected, is that we have a knowledge centre for the business. The IT department were involved in all of the different implementations so they have seen all the questions coming from the different countries. It started just logging how to handle errors but

it now goes beyond system usage to best business practice.

We have put in an E-learning system so all that knowledge is shareable. If you are in just one location it’s quite easy to train people. But if you have more offices and in different countries it’s harder to keep all the people trained in a similar way. Each time someone new comes into the business they now have a total program to show them how and what they need to do in their job.”

“How do we measure the financial benefits? Effectively we are doing it every year when we are doing the budgets. We can see our ICT costs have decreased since 2006. In the end of last year we acquired the Masterlease operations in the Netherlands with about 7,500 lease contracts and we are currently working on integrating that business whilst lowering our IT costs per contract. I would call that a major financial benefit!”

“But there is more. If every country was on its own, without the support of IT to grow the business, it would be difficult and not affordable for our youngest country Hungary to develop facilities like the Careselector - an internet price calculator. But this is available for customers so they can bid for business they wouldn’t otherwise be able to. This makes them a small player but with all the benefits of a large player. If you don’t have these features in a tender for, say, two hundred cars you wouldn’t be considered – and now we are.”

“On the business side it’s important to measure what we have achieved. The commercial people in the countries will not always admit it’s because of the IT, because success has lots of fathers!”

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