

The Suncorp Group

An Agile approach to technology integration helps achieve annual savings for Suncorp

Overview

When leading Australasian diversified financial services group Suncorp merged with Promina in early 2007, the management team developed an ambitious integration goal to realise synergies by 2009.

This goal presented significant challenges: the number of business users and the underlying infrastructure foundation had essentially doubled, and there was disparity in the business and technology environments of the two organisations. Suncorp approached Infosys to help implement a desktop unified business technology platform. By leveraging Suncorp's use of Agile principles and methodologies, Infosys assisted Suncorp in successfully delivering the project across Australia and New Zealand in just 18 months – half the time anticipated by external analysts.

Today, Suncorp not only has a single virtual infrastructure environment (including common software, IP telephony and collaboration tools) which is improving business continuity and productivity, but is also on target to significantly reduce overall IT operating costs of the merged organisation.

Client profile

The Suncorp Group (Suncorp) is one of Australia's leaders in banking, insurance and investment with eight million customers across Australia and New Zealand. In early 2007, Suncorp merged with the Promina to further diversify its general insurance and financial services businesses, bringing with it household names such as AAMI, Vero, Shannons, Apia, Tyndalls and AA Insurance.

The challenge

In May 2007, following the completion of the merger, Executive General Manager of Business Technology Infrastructure Paul Cameron and his team took a deep dive into the Promina business and – as is common with many companies that have grown rapidly – discovered a divergent technology environment. “The businesses operated a variety of different email, storage, calendaring and desktop applications – all of which needed to be evaluated and streamlined,” Cameron explained.

Cameron recalls: “This project was high-profile internally because of the impact it would have on end users. People are always nervous about changes to the desktop environment they are accustomed to.”

“Our focus was on developing a strategic capability for the business and a robust and sustainable platform from which we could grow,” Cameron said. “Having worked with Infosys previously to implement the Suncorp standard operating environment, we were familiar with the benefits this would

offer in terms of business continuity, productivity, mobility and collaboration. We wanted to get those Promina users throughout Australia and New Zealand onboard as quickly as possible.”

Suncorp adopted the theme of ‘ONE’ everything for the program, with specific objectives including:

- ONE integrated desktop platform across all geographies;
- ONE business productivity suite (Microsoft Office 2007);
- ONE common email and calendaring system;
- ONE common storage system;
- ONE production data centre;
- ONE flexible business continuity program (BCP) model; and
- ONE team.

Cameron developed a business case that centred on achieving a significant reduction in operating costs in three years as well as major productivity and business continuity improvements.

With the high visibility of the project Cameron was keen to leverage his ‘A-team’ – including Suncorp leaders, trusted contractors as well as Infosys staff who had worked on the initial Suncorp Desktop Platform (SDP) project – to manage the Promina integration.

Solution design

The project kicked off in June 2007, bringing together priority communication systems, while the broader business case was approved in September. Cameron’s approach to execution was to move as quickly as possible. “Time was our enemy,” he explained. “An integration project such as this is a big, hairy beast and the faster you go the greater cost savings you achieve. The clean-up program resolves issues at the close of the project.”

Infosys was the largest single contractor on the project. Recalling the choice of Infosys, Cameron explains, “We wanted a partner on board who knew their craft, was prepared to make decisions and stand accountable for the outcomes. Infosys had helped deliver Suncorp’s standard operating environment a few years ago and we felt very confident they could do it again using the same model, but this time across both Australia and New Zealand.”

Despite the complexities of the program, the design was completed in just seven weeks and delivered cost-effectively, thanks to the repeatable and scalable model developed in the first project.

An Agile deployment

To minimise the disruption to users, Suncorp leveraged Infosys' selective offshoring model which allowed up to 70 per cent of the deployment to happen from offshore after hours. Over 125 consecutive days, the solution rolled out seamlessly thanks to the extensive planning and change management that had taken place.

Cameron advocates the "Keep It Simple" principle and focused on reducing the complexity of the project. "Application packaging was big," he explained. "We went through a process of culling down the number of desktop applications by more than 80 per cent. We also limited the number of partners involved."

Another critical factor to the success of the project was the application of Agile principles. Cameron explained: "While Agile is usually applied to software development projects, we took the unique step of applying it in an infrastructure environment. This involved story-boarding requirements and placing them into priorities for short, sharp iterations of deployment. We would regularly hold "stand-ups" to revise achievements and challenges and would hold monthly retrospectives to permit appropriate course correction to ensure the project remained on track."

Some 506 pizzas and 253 Thai take away meals later, the project team successfully delivered the Suncorp-Promina integration in just 18 months – half the time initially anticipated by Suncorp's external consultants. "Time is money, so our executive team was overwhelmed with the speed and success of the deployments," Cameron said.

Results to date

Suncorp is now one of the few large corporates within Australasia that can boast a common business productivity platform across the enterprise. Its employees enjoy one email and calendaring system, a single domain login from any desktop computer in the company, access to Instant Messaging, IP telephony, video conferencing and shared training programs; updates to the environment can be rolled out instantaneously.

The deployment concluded in Australia during October 2008 and New Zealand in December 2008. Already help desk calls have started to decline thanks to the more consistent platform, as well as the training and change management provided to bridge the gap for users between the old and the new environments.

The project is part of a larger integration program which will see Suncorp reduce technology operating costs, as well as delivering business productivity improvements associated with a common platform that enables workers to collaborate anywhere, anytime.

On time and on budget delivery have never been more important, according to Infosys Australia CEO Jackie Korhonen. “In today’s economic climate, major projects are under a microscope by senior management and investors – so to be able to help deliver a large-scale integration program in half the time anticipated is a huge achievement. Our clients come to Infosys for complete reliability – when the project absolutely cannot afford to go off track.”

Across the Suncorp business there’s now a feeling that technology “Just works,” noted Cameron. “A project such as this brings a certain level of anxiety with it, so to be receiving positive feedback from users so soon after deployment is a great outcome.”

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