

Ahlers improves productivity and service to its customers with Progress OpenEdge[®] and Progress[®] Sonic ESB[®].

CHALLENGE

The company wanted to ensure reliable and timely access to accurate information and gain the ability to share real-time information with customers.

SOLUTION

Ahlers selected the TRIS Liner Agency module, developed by Progress[®] partner Intris.

WHY PROGRESS[®] SOFTWARE

Because Progress is platform and technology agnostic, it can support Ahlers' heterogeneous environment and integrate with the company's existing and future applications.

BENEFIT

Ahlers expects to increase its employee productivity in Antwerp by nearly five percent this year and eliminate double-entry of data. A flexible graphic interface allows employees to easily access and manage critical information and better serve its customers.

CASE STUDY

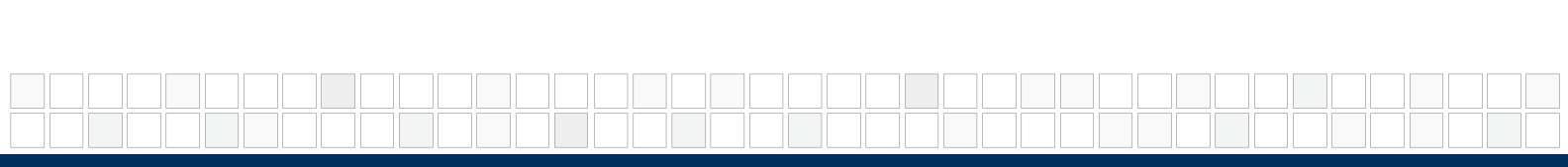
For over 100 years, Ahlers Logistics and Maritime Services has delivered liner agency services. Ahlers is headquartered in the port of Antwerp, Belgium, and operates at ports in China, India, Indonesia, Russia, Singapore, and Vietnam. Ahlers also operates over 45 agency offices throughout Europe, Asia, the Far East, and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)/Baltic.

The company provides a full range of liner agency services. Ahlers acts as an extension of its ship owner clients and provides the services necessary to help them sell available cargo space. Throughout the years, Ahlers has worked with many different types of shippers that carry a wide variety of cargo. The shipping of break-bulk cargo and containers to niche destinations has become a major element of Ahlers' unique value proposition. Ahlers tracks ships and cargoes, and serves as a broker to help its clients attract cargoes to increase billable inventory on ships and optimize the profitability of each shipping run.

Reliable and timely access to accurate information and the ability to share real-time information with customers is key to providing successful liner agency services. Ahlers' legacy liner agency application running in Antwerp was based on an outdated IBM AS/400 midrange with an expired maintenance contract. Management recognized the need to select a new application that could be integrated with legacy applications and with any new enterprise applications Ahlers might deploy in the future. Management also recognized the need to select a flexible solution that could be easily integrated with third-party applications so that Ahlers could streamline information flow within the company and also provide clients with updated real-time cargo and shipping information via electronic data interchange (EDI).

SELECTING TRIS LINER AGENCY SOFTWARE

Ahlers evaluated available applications and selected the TRIS Liner Agency module from Intris N.V., an Antwerp-based software developer with a subsidiary in the Netherlands. "We evaluated alternatives and narrowed it down to a short list of three software suppliers," said Werner Bogaerts, Corporate Manager Agencies for Ahlers. "We then selected TRIS Liner Agency because we wanted a flexible application that could work on multiple hardware environments and could be opened up to provide flexible interfaces for supporting electronic data interchange with our customers.



We needed a reliable application that we could integrate with our legacy applications and that would allow us to improve productivity, customer service, and operating efficiency.”

TRIS Liner Agency is a key module of the TRIS family of software developed by Intris. It supports the processing of tenders, bookings up to and including the ship manifests, import and export, statistics and reporting, and ship settlement. Other TRIS modules are available for airfreight, road transport, transport planning, forwarding, container control, and container repair. All TRIS modules are developed for targeted logistic applications and each TRIS module includes the TRIS Base System, which is the core of the TRIS solution.

Intris is a Premier Application Partner of Progress Software that is focused on developing applications for transportation and logistic services. According to Patrick Van De Looverbosch, General Manager of Intris, “To keep in touch with the daily business needs of our clients, Intris employees have a thorough knowledge of transportation and logistics. As a result of this professional expertise, the integrated TRIS applications are focused on meeting the business needs of our customers.”

The TRIS applications run on the Progress OpenEdge® business application platform, and were developed and are updated using the Progress OpenEdge Advanced Business Language (ABL) object-oriented programming development tools. Van De Looverbosch stated, “We offer integrated software applications that run in multiple environments, and OpenEdge ABL allows us to develop new features and add new capabilities while leveraging the functionality we’ve already developed. We’re able to continuously build on the existing business logic and application functionality and swiftly develop new features.”

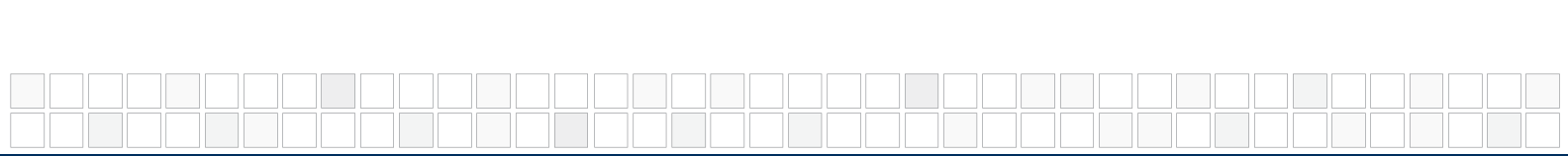
RELYING ON OPENEDGE 10 AND SONIC ESB

The TRIS applications run on the OpenEdge 10 platform, which allows Intris to leverage its transportation and logistics expertise to meet the ever-changing requirements of its customers. “Intris is a long-time Progress Application Partner,” said Van De Looverbosch. “We began working with Progress databases and tools 14 years ago, and we were one of the first Progress Application Partners in Belgium to upgrade to OpenEdge 10. Now, over 75 percent of our customers have already upgraded to OpenEdge 10 so they can take advantage of its performance and functionality.”

Intris relied on the OpenEdge ABL to tailor the application to meet Ahlers’ requirements. “We did not have to do much customization in the core of the application, but we did adapt the application to support data integration using EDI,” said Van De Looverbosch. The tight coupling of OpenEdge with Progress Sonic ESB® allows developers to create distributed business systems. Sonic ESB is the world’s first enterprise service bus, and it allows Progress Application Partners like Intris to take advantage of XML, enterprise-grade communication services, and a service-oriented architecture (SOA) based on Web services standards. It provides a cost-effective way to centrally develop, deploy, and manage services distributed across the extended enterprise.

“We expect to increase our employee productivity in Antwerp by nearly five percent this year.”

— Werner Bogaerts
Corporate Manager
Agencies



A clear evolution from traditional integration brokers and homegrown integration solutions, the Sonic ESB allowed Intris to benefit from incremental deployment. It allows developers to reuse resources from one integration project to the next, and is flexible enough to start at the project level and scale to virtually any size business.

Ahlers wanted to ensure that business information could be securely shared with customers. “We work closely with stevedore companies, shipping companies, and various subcontractors, so timely and reliable sharing of shipping and cargo information is critical,” said Bogaerts. “EDI improves our productivity and allows us to better represent the interests of our customers. It saves time by avoiding the need to enter information twice. We wanted to provide customers and partners with online access to liner agency information. EDI accelerates decision making and it avoids duplicate entry of data.”

Together, Intris and Progress Software developed the integration and deployed the solution. The TRIS Liner Agency module is now used in production in Antwerp, carrying data on most of the shipping lines that Ahlers represents. The remaining lines are being migrated now, and Ahlers will retire the legacy AS/400 application upon completion.

The implementation and deployment of Sonic ESB has allowed Ahlers to expose the appropriate interfaces to enable information sharing with customers. Ahlers has also leveraged Sonic ESB to enable integration of the TRIS Liner Agency module with legacy enterprise applications. For example, Ahlers runs a single financial application across all its location, and financial data captured in the TRIS Liner Agency module in Antwerp is automatically fed into the financial application without the time-consuming requirement of re-keying the information.

“Here in Antwerp we needed to integrate TRIS with other applications,” explained Bogaerts. “But as an organization, we also need to integrate applications in other ports. Ahlers has already deployed Sonic ESB technology to create an enterprise service bus to integrate applications in our operations in the ports of St. Petersburg and Moscow. “We have different applications running in different locations, and our goal was not to change them all, but to ensure that all applications could be integrated over a common backbone,” said Bogaerts.

RELYING ON PLATFORM INDEPENDENT, INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS

Intris is in the process of embedding Sonic ESB technology into the TRIS Base System and all of its modules to enable interoperability. “We are Progress believers,” said Van De Looverbosch. “Intris began as a platform-specific technical team, and Progress technology allows us to deliver platform-independent software that leverages our transportation and logistics industry expertise and allows us to integrate our software modules with legacy and third-party software applications.”

“Any new enterprise software we deploy in the future will be required to integrate over Sonic ESB,” explained Bogaerts. “This has been a successful implementation in Antwerp, and we will soon have information on all the lines that we represent running on TRIS Liner Agency.

We expect to increase our employee productivity in Antwerp by nearly five percent this year because of the power of application interoperability, the ability to eliminate double-entry of data, and a flexible graphic interface that allows us to easily access and manage critical information and serve our customers." Ahlers is now evaluating additional TRIS modules to support its integrated logistics and warehousing business in the future.

The vision of Ahlers for open and integrated liner agency software was met by the industry-specific software development expertise of Intris, flexible and adaptable OpenEdge technology, and the technical expertise of Progress consultants in Belgium who supported the Sonic ESB integration and implementation.

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ABOUT PROGRESS SOFTWARE

Progress Software Corporation (Nasdaq: PRGS) provides application infrastructure software for the development, deployment, integration and management of business applications. Our goal is to maximize the benefits of information technology while minimizing its complexity and total cost of ownership.

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