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Pete Keeley
Innov8 Programme
Manager, Unilever

Unilever rationalise support and extend value of legacy scientific applications with Tessella expertise

When Unilever needed to rationalise the way it supported and maintained its legacy scientific applications, it called on Tessella’s unique blend of professional and scientific software expertise. Initially focusing on key applications, the outsourced support service has provided Unilever with a point of contact that is delivering higher levels of support, tighter control over costs, and a systematic way of improving the quality and maintainability of R&D legacy applications – which is extending their value to the business and providing a platform for more rapid global expansion.

Background and Challenge

Unilever is one of the world’s most successful consumer goods companies. On average somebody chooses a Unilever product 150 million times a day, from leading cleaning brands like Cif, Domestos, Comfort and Persil to well-known food brands like Magnum, Cornetto and Bertolli. Headquartered in the UK, Unilever employs over 150,000 people across the globe and generates annual revenues in excess of \$38 billion.

Pete Keeley, Innov8 Programme Manager at Unilever takes up the story, “Like all global multinationals we are always looking for ways to reduce cost and drive greater efficiency across the business.”

Over the years the number of scientific applications, such as formulation systems, in use at Unilever’s three main European laboratory sites has grown to over 120, many of which were of varying quality and often poorly documented and maintained. After evaluating each application, the team prioritised this down to 45.



Pete continues, "We were still, however, faced with the challenge of how best to support and maintain these legacy applications, which in many cases was only provided on an ad hoc basis or had become dependent on a single support person or vendor. And, with over 20 different suppliers as well as the in-house team involved in support, it was very difficult to easily and accurately measure the cost of support by application."

Unilever set about rationalising the number of suppliers it dealt with and finding a lead partner that could provide a focal point for outsourced application support and maintenance. Pete continues, "Having a primary point of contact would not only provide us with a more consistent and responsive support service, but also much better visibility into the true cost of support for each application."

"In addition, to have these applications properly documented and brought up to a uniform standard in one hit would have been prohibitively expensive, so the outsource partner also needed to be able to incrementally improve quality and maintainability as support issues arose and changes were applied."

Solution and Benefits

Pete continues, "Having engaged Tessella on a number of development projects over the years, we selected them to begin providing support and maintenance on a number of our key legacy applications."

"After several months, the benefits of operating this way are already apparent. Users of these applications are seeing more consistent support, but more importantly, from a business perspective, we now have a focal point and regular detailed reports that enable us to better understand, control and budget the cost of support by application."

In addition, the overall quality and maintainability of each application is being improved with every

fix and change. Pete continues, "Tessella are very professional when it comes to documentation, testing and QA. Having a clear understanding of the state of each application also makes it easier to assess the true cost/benefit of undertaking enhancements. Tessella really understands R&D users and processes. This translates into responsive levels of support, and a real appreciation for how each application can be enhanced going forward."

Ultimately, using Tessella for outsourced support and maintenance gives Unilever a cost-effective way of extending the value of their legacy scientific applications and maximising the return on their original investment.

Future

Pete concludes, "We are very pleased with the service provided by Tessella. It has given us much tighter control over support costs, but we also now have a mechanism for confidently deploying legacy applications into our new laboratories in China and India as the business expands."

"Having applications that are in a well documented and maintainable state also gives us the flexibility to swap in different engineers or suppliers should the need arise – which eliminates our reliance on any one supplier or support person. This has given us the confidence to look at extending Tessella's remit to providing outsourced support and maintenance for our other legacy applications as well as applying this approach to new scientific applications."

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