Mantis Conversion - Somerfield

Heavily reliant on an aging system written in Mantis, Somerfield faced the challenge of maintaining and enhancing essential programs that were used for day to day invoice processing within an environment that was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. TSG, with their many years of experience in conversions, were able to offer a proven solution to the supermarket chain that also brought financial benefits.

About Somerfield

Somerfield is a high street supermarket with stores in many prominent locations throughout the UK offering high quality food with a particular emphasis on fresh foods and convenient shopping.

THE PROBLEM

Somerfield were using Cincom's Mantis - acquired in 1988 - to develop online programs on the mainframe. Because of the age of the Mantis product they were facing difficulties maintaining the system, as Mantis developers were becoming more scarce.

Problem
Aging Mantis system
Difficult to maintain
Scarcity of Mantis developers

Solution
Conversion of Mantis programs and applications to COBOL

Benefits
COBOL system easier to support
Removal of Mantis licence costs
Availability of COBOL developers

As new products emerged Somerfield also found they were creating fewer new systems using Mantis, and therefore had less of a reason to invest in Mantis developers. The combination of an aging system and the dwindling pool of Mantis developers forced them to consider the future of the Mantis product.

Many applications created in Mantis were, however, still being used and were essential to the continued operation of the supermarket chain. With over 60,000 invoices per week being processed by Mantis created programs, Mantis was considered to be a critical system to the business and could not simply be retired.

THE SOLUTION

Somerfield spent a period of time looking for a system to replace Mantis that would allow them to continue using the Mantis created programs and applications, and also create new ones. However, they found that all potential replacement systems required a large investment.

TSG were able to offer Somerfield a way of replacing the programs and applications created in Mantis, and give them a new, more standard, environment within which to create new ones.

Their answer was to convert all of the Mantis code to COBOL CICS, resulting in programs that were identical in functionality to those created in Mantis, but were far easier to maintain. All of this was done without the need to invest in a new product.

In total, TSG converted over 250 programs and screens into COBOL using their code converter, giving Somerfield the exact same capabilities but in a modern language, at a fraction of the cost of replacing the system, and with no ongoing licence costs or upgrade fees.

There were other upsides besides keeping the old programs too. Whilst licence fees were not the main concern for Somerfield, by converting from Mantis to COBOL TSG did eliminate the need for Somerfield to pay the annual Mantis licence, saving Somerfield a large annual licensing bill.

THE OUTCOME

The option to convert the Mantis programs proved to be very cost effective. Tom Scott, Director of IT Services at Somerfield, states "The conversion was achieved in less than one year's worth of licence costs.". More importantly, with the programs being written in COBOL the system became much easier to support, and saved Somerfield the costs and problems associated with maintaining the aging Mantis system.

Furthermore, the way TSG handled the conversion had no impact on the day to day running of the business. "The whole systems were converted without any loss of production or key impact to the organisation." says Scott.

"They identified the code needing to be converted, took it away, and delivered the new code back. As simple as that."

Finally, as the Mantis system was approaching its licence renewal date there was added time pressure on TSG to complete the conversion on time. Thanks to the reliability of their code converter they were able to perform the conversion very quickly and eliminated the possibility of human error, which substantially reduced the need for testing.

IN SUMMARY

TSG provided Somerfield with a like for like environment to replace their Mantis system that could be maintained by existing developers and avoided the costs associated with hiring or training Mantis developers. Furthermore, the conversion costs were recouped within one year, and there were ongoing cost savings resulting from the removal of Mantis licensing fees.

TSG's code converter and the expertise of their developers were recognised as being largely accountable for the rapid, reliable conversion of the code.