

Rapid, reliable data exchange

IM/3 provides efficient interfaces to Switzerland's Interdiscount stores

Interdiscount, Switzerland's leading consumer electronics chain, is renowned for its low prices. Every day, Interdiscount's headquarters exchanges information such as price updates, master data, and cash-register reports with 185 stores. Until recently, the company used IBM's SAP Retail Interchanger for these communications. But there was no way to automatically transfer data between the POS (point-of-sales) systems and the SAP environment at Interdiscount headquarters. As a result, generating reports and financial statements entailed collating and entering data manually – a time-consuming and error-prone process. Interdiscount therefore needed to find a fast, flexible, and cost-effective way of integrating its POS systems with its SAP systems. The retail chain found the answer to its data exchange needs in REALTECH's IM/3.

: success story

Interdiscount



Ingo Schuchardt,
Head of SAP Basis, Interdiscount

“Our investment in IM/3 has really paid off. Master data is now maintained via a central point of administration: the SAP system at headquarters. IM/3 gives us highly efficient data links with our stores, enabling us to exchange mission-critical information quickly and reliably. It has also significantly reduced our maintenance overhead, and generated a return on investment after just 18 months.”





Flexible interface management boosts efficiency

Interdiscount, a Coop Group company, is Switzerland's leading home electronics chain, with a market share of 18 percent. With some 185 outlets and 1,700 employees, Interdiscount generates annual revenues of more than 800 million Swiss francs. Its stores offer a wide range of consumer electronics, such as TVs, hi-fi systems, cameras, computers and household appliances.

Data needs to be exchanged between company headquarters and the stores on a daily basis. This includes prices, product numbers and POS data. The central accounting department, in particular, requires access to the latest sales figures and order volumes. Until recently, IBM's SAP Retail Interchanger software was used to exchange data between the stores' POS systems and the central SAP solution by means of FTP file transfer. In many cases, figures had to be re-entered manually. *"This created far too much work for our employees. And it was impossible to do the job efficiently because of the inevitable mistakes that are made when data is typed in by hand,"* recalls Ingo Schuchardt, head of SAP Basis at Interdiscount. In addition, the functionality available for exchanging data between order management, inventory and accounts was highly inflexible. *"A minor change to the POS systems required time- and cost-intensive programming, for example to update conversion rules,"* explains Schuchardt.

Another reason for seeking alternative interface software was the upcoming expiry of the maintenance agreement for the existing IBM integration solution. Interdiscount wanted the new solution to be based on SAP technology, as several of its IT staff had considerable experience with ABAP

interface programming. Interdiscount chose the IM/3 InterfaceManager developed by software specialist REALTECH, headquartered in Walldorf, Germany. Based on SAP technology, this tried-and-trusted solution was far more powerful and robust than the tool it replaced, and an ROI simulation indicated a return within 18 months. But the crucial factor for Interdiscount was the ability to manage and monitor all interfaces from a central point of control.



Interdiscount wanted a simple, cost-effective solution that did not require additional hardware, and that would integrate seamlessly with SAP's transport management system. REALTECH's close partnership with SAP added further weight to Interdiscount's decision: *"We knew there was no real alternative to IM/3. If we had continued with the original solution, we would have faced excessive maintenance and license costs,"* says Schuchardt.

Timing was everything

One of the main project challenges was the restricted time window available for daily data exchange with the stores. The legacy solution relied heavily on data compression as a means of saving time. IM/3 supports multiple concurrent data exchange processes, eliminating the need for compression.

The project kicked off in August 2002 with the documentation of existing interfaces. Working with Interdiscount, it took REALTECH's IT specialists another 80 days to complete the switchover. By early March 2003, 64 stores had been hooked up to headquarters via the new method. Interdiscount's own IT professionals were able to perform most of the interface conversion work. A REALTECH employee was on hand to assist with the integration of the InterfaceManager.

Two Interdiscount employees currently use IM/3 to monitor all interfaces within the production environment. *"Transferring data and monitoring interfaces has become very simple now that an SAP system handles master data and interface status information,"* reports Schuchardt. *"Everything now works like clockwork. Errors in the master data are no longer a problem because we update prices in the stores on the fly, without disrupting the POS systems. Our operations have become much more efficient, which in turn has significantly reduced our system administration costs."*

Technical data:

IM/3's task: Integrate POS systems with central SAP solution
SAP system: 4.0B
SAP platform: IBM AIX RS/6000
POS platform: Windows NT
Number of stores: 200
Data volume: Up to 10 MB per day