



e-business



## Pacific International Lines (PIL) Logistics opens its sails to e-business.

*Pacific International Lines Logistics implemented a new e-warehouse management system that links seven-user sites in disparate locations to its main hub in Singapore. As a result, the company streamlined its workflow, minimised manual processes, got end-to-end visibility of its processes and made its staff more productive*



Pacific International Lines (PIL) Logistics Pte Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of a Singapore based shipping player PIL Shipping, undertook major revamps in its operations, especially logistics communications with its partners. With a spanking new warehouse management system (WMS), the company is now able to offer real time inventory and execution visibility to its clients, by bringing new information technology into the core of its workflow.

Customers can log into the PIL Logistics transaction server based in Singapore via web browser to check its inventory sitting in various geographical locations. More importantly the single instance technology allows visibility of the physical ground operations from anywhere, anytime.

The system PIL set up is a virtual warehouse in seven user sites - five in China and two in



Malaysia. The hub itself is located and based in Singapore, with all transactions logged here. All major operational support is also expected to come out of Singapore, especially in areas of operational quality control and system management.

### Single Instance Deployment

The WMS backend was built, using Oracle 9i database and tools. Essentially it is a Single Instance Application tool that leverage on the Internet infrastructure. All the databases and applications reside in a main data centre in Singapore. Users only need web access to use the application in real time.

Customers are spreading their wings quickly into new markets and they inevitably need good logistics support on the ground. For PIL Logistics, this is an opportunity to expand its business together with its customers, but to succeed it needed to invest in cutting-edge



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technology to keep up with the demands of the business.

PIL Logistics is among the few that has rolled out single instance application across several geographical countries. Effectively it cuts down the operational set-up time at site and eliminates the need for local IT support. An operational site in China can be set-up within one week. This greatly improves the initial steep learning curve in any new operation start-up.

Besides deployment speed, the single instance application brings day-to-day operation visibility of any operational sites, whether in China or Malaysia. This greatly enhances the quality management control capability of the Singapore office.

In the traditional distributed system, which catered primarily for data transfer, detailed operational mechanics were not visible. This made problem solving reactive, where errors were only discovered at the end of the process. In the newer system, more transparency in the operational steps allows identifying and smoothing out kinks in the intermediate processes.

**Cross-training of staff**

The operations and IT teams were originally different and specialised only in their own jobs, but with the need to integrate operations with IT, both sides have become conversant with skills from the other camp. The Ops & IT teams now integrate into 1 unit comprises four people to support the 7 operational sites from its Singapore hub.

All are cross-trained in both ops and technical support, so that if need arises, there is backup. Currently, the Singapore team is responsible for the full implementation of all new operational sites. The steps taken for a new site includes mapping and integration of local processes, warehousing needs and customised configurations for each site.

The project team wants to retain focus on developing control of the workflow rather than the nitty-gritty's of the software platform. Upon deployment, the team heads to the new site. From previous experience, this allows them to conduct quick reviews into the specifications process at each site, and the familiar experience allows troubleshooting almost instinctively. The team then returns to fine-tune the needed system

back in Singapore, before porting over to the browser-based solution, and flying over to train the ground staff in its use.

Typically the training and handholding takes place within 2 weeks on site. The team takes a peer-to-peer instead of a top-down approach in its training. This provides confidence to the users. At the same time, it gives opportunity for the Singapore team to better appreciate and adjust to the local working culture.

Raymond Huang, group general manager for PIL Logistics, said, "The local users feel more confident, especially when our personnel are both IT and Operation literate, to use the system than to return to their comfort zone."

**Keeping it simple, but effective**

To compete with rivals' offerings, the company chose to stick to the age-old mantra - keeping their offering simple. Huang said that technologies in Singapore that are already seen as indispensable might not fit in other countries, which may still be using less advanced technologies like pen and paper or Excel spreadsheets.

"We must not get carried away by the latest and greatest," he said.

So rather than bolt on features, the edge perceived by the company is to have the processes simplified, and then highly optimised for performance. This is reflected in the way the applications are presented to the users. Only essential information necessary for the operation is shown on the screen. Multiple windows overloaded with features were avoided. This is to minimise the load on the Internet infrastructure in the regional countries to avoid degradation on application performance.

"Less is good - you can add. With more, you have to throw away," said Mr TS Teo, Managing Director of PIL Logistics. .

