

SEAMLESS INTEGRATION OF SAP WITH CATIA

Large automobile manufacturers continually demand more from their suppliers. A uniform database and smooth IT ensure competitive advantages.

Now things are really getting serious. Collaborative Engineering has long been a catchword in the sector – and now automobile manufacturers are putting on the pressure: “The large OEMs are going on the offensive against their suppliers,” says Josef Summer, Head of Technical Data Processing CAD-PLM at the Austrian automobile manufacturer Hirschmann Automotive GmbH. At the forefront, BMW intends to intensify collaborative development. For suppliers, smooth IT and a database that conforms to the OEM are becoming decisive factors in competition. Every employee must instantly know where to find what data. “And even more importantly: their colleagues must be able to find the data again the next day. Redundancy would be fatal here,” stressed the IT professional.

Some time ago, this was one of the largest challenges at Hirschmann. Two systems were in use for data processing: SAP R/3 and AXALANT – but without any functional integration. “Communication between SAP, AXALANT and finally even CATIA never really worked,” says Josef

Summer, explaining the dilemma. Due to the abundance of data, and on top of that due to the various Hirschmann sites, data storage clarity issues were preprogrammed.

► ALL IN ONE SYSTEM

Consistent and centralised data management in CATIA V4 and V5 was thus the clear goal. CENIT was able to implement its CDI software for the seamless integration of SAP with CATIA – for both CATIA V4 and V5. The entire development

In the second step of the project, the integration of SAP and CATIA then opened the way for completely new processes – such as in the setup of new master data. Previously, this only took place at the end of component development. “Setup of master data was carried out much too late, namely after completing the project,” Summer still remembers with alarm. Today, the situation is completely different with the CDI solution: Now the designer specifies the material, a document information set and a parts list. These data are then updated in a parallel

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Josef Summer
Head of Technical Data Processing

process can thus be mapped directly in the CATIA environment, all from within SAP. Distribution scenarios and control functions for release and change processes alike can be applied.

With the importing of neutral formats from AXALANT into SAP, a first major success was already achieved only briefly after the project started on 1 March 2003. Sophisticated batch runs automated this nightly routine. An important milestone for helping users get into the habit of finding the relevant data – such as TIF files – in the SAP system.

process during the project.

This alone already leads to positive effects, especially in communication between the designer and the time and motion study specialist.

► CRITICAL ISSUE: DATA IMPORT

The hottest phase of the project finally began with the import of legacy data from AXALANT into SAP. Because in CATIA V4 – in contrast to V5 – position matrixes are not managed, these first had to be filtered out of the AXALANT system.



HIRSCHMANN
AUTOMOTIVE

HIRSCHMANN: ALL IN ONE SYSTEM

Without support from the manufacturer, this was hard work – especially for CENIT. Many days were invested before the matrices and the legacy data were finally prepared such that they could be simply exported on a single weekend without any problems. For Josef Summer one thing is still fascinating: “Until now, literally only five people have called who could not find something. And that with over 50,000 data sets.”

To achieve such results, two things are particularly important: support from top management and a redesign of existing business processes. Both occurred in exemplary fashion at Hirschmann, because management constantly emphasised the advantages of the entire project. “The simple fact that our manager, Dr. Anton Schwab, said he actively participated and shared responsibility for the necessary changes already contributed significantly to the project’s success,” Summer summarises.

Speaking of process design: “In our project, designing the software based on existing processes did not promote reaching our goal. Redesigning processes is what is important.” said Summer, summing up his experiences. Such as series development, for example: before the introduction of CATIA V5, Hirschmann developers made suggestions for the new tool and the process environment. Based on these suggestions, CENIT created a comprehensive proposition. Summer remembers it well: “The effort that resulted from it would have been enormous.” The wish list was thus examined point for point. The developers, together with CENIT, were then shown how CATIA standard already covered many requirements.

The important role of a partner like CENIT became quite clear: “The consultants approached the issues in every phase in a very neutral manner. Regar-

ding the wish list, CENIT could simply have programmed the changes – but we were able to find other, more innovative solutions in our dialogue,” says Summer, enthused about the cooperation. CENIT put in great effort and tried to understand Hirschmann processes. CENIT’s extensive sector experience and high level of flexibility were highly beneficial to the automobile manufacturer. “It was a great help to me to be able to talk with an external consultant – that brought a lot of fresh wind into our sails and new ideas into our company!”

► PLM HELPS HIRSCHMANN PROGRESS

Today, Summer describes the project as an “investment in the future” – especially because of the high integration achieved through the PLM solution. Thus, production can now completely do without paper based binders. That alone produces great potential. But above all, centralised data management in SAP has paid off for Hirschmann. “Those are innovations that

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are hard to evaluate monetarily. But I know that they have brought Hirschmann miles forward,” said Summer, showing his satisfaction with the results of the project.

The consolidation phase has currently begun in Rankweil. Many adjustments have been made in IT. “Now it has to first prove itself in practice and be broken in,” said Summer. But he nonetheless already has a new item on his agenda: the new CENIT ENTERPRISE CONNECTOR.

In the future – as is already the case in construction – one will thus be able to feed SAP directly. Data will thus be imported or exported directly from the SAP PLM environment, while both native CAD formats, neutral formats and even accompanying office documents will be supported. Hirschmann will thus be able to exchange data with OEMs and partners even more flexibly in the future. Yet another plus for Hirschmann in the stiff competitive environment.

► THE PROJECT

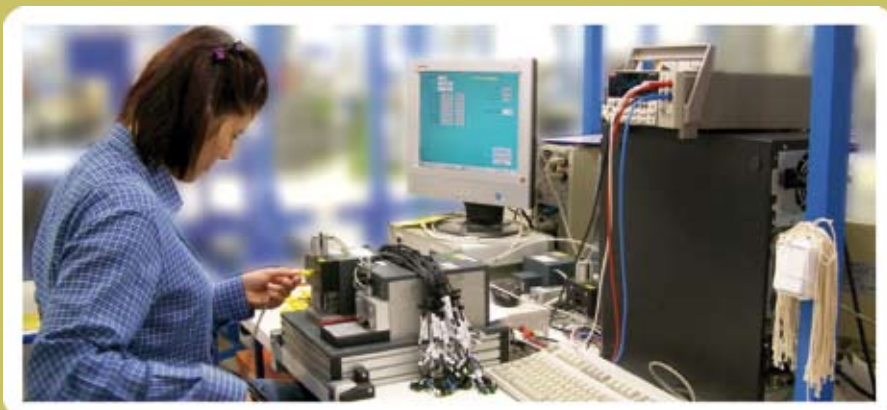
- Process redesign in the sense of a uniform PLM approach
- Replacement of AXALANT, SAP as central data management
- Introduction of CENIT’s Direct Integration SAP to CATIA V4/V5 (CDI)
- Employee training by CENIT

► ABOUT HIRSCHMANN

Hirschmann Automotive GmbH is your competent partner for innovative solu-

Josef Summer
Head of Technical Data Processing

tions in the field of automotive connector technology. Its product range includes a multitude of mechatronic components, intelligent sensor/actor elements, connectors and contact systems, cable sets (round and flat) for the most varied applications in security-related and highly stressed areas of vehicles. With 900 employees, the company generated sales of EUR 72 million in 2004.



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