

Drug discovery company Evotec upgrades IFS, setting the company up for the future & helping deliver on its 'research never stops' promise



Evotec is a fast-growing, global, high-quality provider in the drug discovery field and has a 20-year corporate history. Founded in 1993, the company has built substantial drug discovery expertise and deep internal knowledge in the fields of metabolic diseases, neuroscience, pain, inflammation and oncology. By leveraging these skills and expertise, the company intends to develop best-in-class differentiated therapeutics and deliver superior science-driven discovery alliances with pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies. Headquartered in Hamburg, Germany, the Evotec Group operates worldwide with subsidiaries in Germany, UK and USA.

The challenge

In recent years, a sizeable chunk of its growth has come from acquisitions, says Trevor Jones, Senior Accountant at Evotec. "Drug discovery is an extremely competitive market, so we tend to look for acquisitions that can give us new skill sets."

Such strategies are predicated on having a rock solid Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system to underpin the business, ensuring new acquisition companies can be added with minimal disruption to the business. "An unexpected side effect of the upgrade process is that we have now identified a team and a tight procedure that will serve us well when adding newly acquired companies. So once we are informed that we are making another acquisition we can start to get the team in place and know we can do it," said Mr. Jones.

His confidence is natural, given Evotec's ERP system – supplied by IFS – had been in place for around five years, giving it plenty of time to bed in, and for staff to become familiar with it. Indeed, Evotec had previously been running ERP software from two different suppliers but had switched to IFS when it decided to consolidate, based on its ability to fit with its project-based business. "In a lot of respects, we're a straightforward company when it comes to what we need from an ERP system," said Mr. Jones.

About Evotec

Evotec is a drug discovery alliance and development partnership company focused on rapidly progressing innovative product approaches with leading pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies. Evotec operates worldwide providing the highest quality stand-alone and integrated drug discovery solutions, covering all activities from target-to-clinic. The company has established a unique position by assembling top-class scientific experts and integrating state-of-the-art technologies as well as substantial experience and expertise in key therapeutic areas including neuroscience, pain, metabolic diseases as well as oncology and inflammation.

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“However, it’s our interactions with clients – our desire to make sure we meet their requirements – that means our systems need to be flexible,” he added.

The types of staff that use the system are split between 70 power users, that rely on the system for their day-to-day jobs and more than 600 users who will log into the system on a regular basis. Nonetheless, in the fast-paced world of enterprise IT, five-year-old software has often been superseded.

“We were running a fairly old version of IFS, and there was a lot of new functionality in IFS that we were keen to get our hands on,” said Jon Reason, Evotec’s Senior Systems Engineer.

The solution

Mr. Jones and Mr. Reason were tasked with putting together a proposal to upgrade their software to IFS’ latest offering.

Evotec’s management board needed a little persuading that the upgrade to IFS would deliver value for money and help support the business in years to come, said Mr. Jones. However, they also had some ground rules which were not up for negotiation.

“Evotec is a public company, therefore we couldn’t do the upgrade near to the end of a financial quarter; because of risk of disruption,” says Mr. Jones, “and for practical reasons the upgrade would have to be in the middle of a month.”

Having received approval for the upgrade in July 2012 Mr. Jones and Mr. Reason, now the joint project leaders, assembled their project team of 44 staff, gathered from all areas of the business and also all locations, at the beginning of October.

In conjunction with dedicated consultants from IFS, the team decided that the upgrade project could be completed within a year and set a target go-live date of October 2013.

“The software was working well for us and would have continued to do so,” said Mr. Reason, “but we wanted to upgrade because of the additional functionality in IFS – such as the enhanced reporting capabilities and ability to integrate seamlessly with a wide variety of third-party software.”

The implementation

The project began by establishing how the business could be broken down to facilitate the upgrade. “We established a handful of groups to oversee the various ‘streams’ of Evotec’s business processes,” said Mr. Reason. These streams were charged with establishing how the upgrade would impact various business processes, such as its procure-to-pay system and its order-to-cash process. The teams then worked with colleagues from IFS to build test versions of the upgraded system and analyse the requirements for making the switch-over.

Benefits

- Enhanced reporting capabilities
- Seamless third party integrations
- Upgrade completed ahead of schedule, bringing project in under budget



After the first test version had been put through its paces successfully it became apparent to the project leaders that, thanks to the way IFS had streamlined the upgrade process and the way the Evotec team had worked, the timeframe they had allowed had some scope for reduction.

“We were quite cautious at first – after all, the last thing you want to do is appear over confident and then fail to deliver. But the more we looked at it, the more convinced we became that we could bring this in ahead of time,” said Mr. Jones. The next step was to get their IFS consultants and their stream leaders on board. “That proved to be far easier than we expected – everyone had an air of confidence after the results of the first run through,” added Mr. Jones. So the decision was made to bring forward the go-live date by two months.

The rich functionality of IFS also helped smooth the upgrade process, providing Evotec with an ERP system in which they removed their previous modifications. “We’d run the previous version with a few significant modifications but, as time had gone by, we realised we perhaps didn’t need all of them,” said Mr. Reason. “Meanwhile, when we reviewed IFS, we realised other modifications we’d used previously had been incorporated into the release as core functionality. Having an out-of-the-box system made the upgrade easier and will be easier to support.”

The results

By bringing the implementation project forward, Evotec was also able to bring the project in under budget. While it may be natural to expect such success to be cause for celebration, Mr. Jones admits the response in some quarters was somewhat muted. “Our CFO described the project to me as ‘a non-event;’” he said.

But beneath that throwaway remark lays a greater indication of the upgrade’s success. “Our CFO takes a keen interest in major projects, and needs to keep the board informed of any cost over runs. We talked every two weeks about how the upgrade was going, so when he says it was a non-event, that was a really positive comment,” said Mr. Jones. “It means we didn’t give him any cause for concern and that he was confident in the process.”

“Users have taken to IFS enthusiastically. We ran extensive ‘cascaded’ training sessions for the regular users, which we held back until two weeks before the revised go-live date; then we held a number of drop-in events across our sites, after we were live, where we were showing staff how the updated user interface would work and answering any teething problems on a one-to-one basis,” explained Mr. Reason.

“The upgrade team had expected reasonable interest but were blown away by the numbers that turned up. And as a result of the staff engagement, the IFS Enterprise Explorer interface is helping staff become more productive. We’ve had a lot of feedback about how the new interface has made life easier when carrying out major parts of their jobs,” said Mr. Jones.

Looking towards the future, Trevor Jones says Evotec now plan to utilise new functionality within IFS to improve their business processes.

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Trevor Jones, Senior Accountant,
Evotec

Find out more

Further information, e-mail info@ifs.com, contact your local IFS office or visit our web site, ifs.com

