embraceTALK

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Left: Steve Wookey delivers ACS-Embrace 30thAnniversary Message at Pieter Toerien Theatre

Editors Note

Welcome to the latest edition of embraceTALK.

The year kicked off with our special 30th Anniversary celebration, at Monte Casino, *"An Audience with Pieter-Dirk EISH – "Celebrating 3 Decades"* *a*nd what an amazing and entertaining evening that was! Write-ups and pictures were featured in the local press; in fact, ACS-Embrace has made at least 10 press appearances this year!

We take great delight in sharing excerpts from Steve's speech as well as other special moments shared with you at this momentous occasion.

By popular request and in preparation for the imminent release of Embrace Version 14 our special feature unpacks the **UAT** process.

It is with enormous pride that we showcase how **Antalis**, our very first ACS-Embrace client, continues to "**Optimise Embrace for Growth and Competitive Advantage!**"

We have participated in many Expos this year, including the "Buy Local Summit" "autoMechanika" and the "TruckX" Expo, where we proudly showcased Embrace alongside two of our prestigious clients, namely MAN Truck & Bus and Tata, both of whom were nominated for numerous awards, proving that with Embrace….

Success is not an option. It comes bundled with the software!

Jeanette

30 Year Anniversary Message from Steve Wookey – Managing Director

Thank you to everyone who joined us to celebrate our 30thanniversary earlier this year, at Monte Casino. It was so good to be surrounded by so many warm familiar faces that make up our ACS-Embrace community.

One is tempted on an occasion like this to present a history lesson, however I am pleased to say that won't be necessary as *"a journey through our history"* was published in the previous issue of embraceTALK and is now available on our website. I will though briefly touch on a few points of interest, one being how it all started.

Just over 30 years ago, in 1984, Mike Stefanski invited a group of enthusiastic, young people to join him for a drink to discuss and embrace an exciting business opportunity. The group that assembled that evening, namely Mike Stefanski, Viv Davies (later to become Viv Stefanski), Gavin Fairon, Martin de Bruin and Steve Wookey, were to be the founders of ACS.

Mike had seen that there was a shortage of good software support in the market place. He had noticed how Viv, Martin and I had managed to run successful implementations of different overseas software products by becoming self-sufficient and doing all our own programming and support.

Mike's vision was for the 3 of us to start a software house supporting the two most popular packages available on Prime Computers, whilst he and Gavin continued selling hardware. We all agreed that this was a great idea, were immediately on board and plans were put in place!

On the 2nd of January 1985 we opened our doors and began trading – as **A**ssociated **C**omputer **S**olutions. We started off hand-to-mouth but our services were in such great demand that we quickly grew the company.

In spite of doing well, I always had a strong belief that we, in South Africa, could write software comparable to that being produced in the United States and Europe, if not better.

Being passionate about software development, we rose to the challenge and our proudly South African, local ERP software package was born and in 1986 was christened "Embrace".

That same year we implemented Embrace at our first client, Wiggins Teape, a paper merchant, now trading as Antalis and still today operating on Embrace.

It has been a colourful and exciting 30 years, filled with ups and downs, some disappointments, much joy and an abundance of blessings. We have lived through the trauma of belonging to 2 different large listed groups. We have had subsidiaries in the UK and Australia and have sites in SADAC and Australia. We have had a hardware company, a library system and a Business Intelligence company.

But at the end of the day it was Embrace that was our reason for being; it was Embrace that always sustained us. So rather than being pulled in different directions by those who owned us, we who are passionate about Embrace and believed in its future, decided in 2004 to buy ACS - and the **WE** was the **staff!**

The staff took out bonds and raised enough money to buy ACS from the banks that owned us and put together sufficient working capital to fund the running of the company. The anniversary of that MBO is also celebrated this year as we mark 10 years as a staff owned, staff empowered, "Proudly South African" company.

I believe that what we have at ACS is very special, the relationships, the culture we embody and the product, Embrace, are all exceptional. But all of this is nothing without the people – the people who work with us and the people who are our clients who give us our purpose.

Thank you for making ACS and Embrace what it is today and thank you for enabling us to achieve this significant milestone.

Unpacking the importance of the UAT Process as part of your Embrace upgrade strategy

An ERP software upgrade can be a critical milestone for a company both in terms of operational efficiency and growth. Version upgrades open up new functionality designed to meet business demands, enables innovation and optimises software support. New version enhancements will make it easier for businesses to increase efficiency and boost profitability.

While we agree that you don't need to upgrade every time a new update is released, we believe that being up-to-date on the latest release of Embrace has significant benefits, ensures on-going support and reduces security risks. Each software upgrade contains a new fix to security issues that were previously overlooked.

The imminent release of Embrace version 14 has given fresh impetus to the importance of having a formalised (UAT) **U**ser **A**cceptance **T**esting procedure in place.

The success of any upgrade is dependent on the strategy we take. There are numerous activities we undergo at each stage of the upgrade but a critical success factor to any upgrade is User Acceptance Testing and it is this activity we are focussing on in our special feature.

Any new version of Embrace should be tested, on site in a Demo environment before it is installed into the Live environment. If the testing procedure is streamlined and simplified, it is possible to stay abreast with each new version at a reasonable cost and with minimal risk.

Alpha testing process

Any change to software carries a certain amount of risk. This risk is mitigated as far as possible within the Embrace development environment by our in-house testing procedures. New versions are first tested within the (QC) Quality Control department as well as by selected power users as part of the Alpha testing process.

Beta test site

The software is then released to one client site, i.e. a client who has volunteered to be a beta test site for the new version. The R&D department is on standby during the beta test phase as well as after go Live to ensure that the upgrade proceeds smoothly. Once all issues encountered have been resolved and the beta site is live, the software is made available as a general release.

While this process goes a long way towards ensuring that the software released is error free, problems can still be encountered because of unique procedures or customisations at specific client sites. To avoid these issues, we recommend that standard job functions be tested in a demo environment, with particular emphasis on testing customised development.

UAT Process Preparation

We would suggest that the creation of a test plan be approached in the following way:

- Set up a Demo environment for testing by making a copy of your Live system.

- Ask senior users to create standard test cases for each job function. This should include the data that is captured as input, as well as the outputs that will be produced (i.e. documents and reports). Make copies of input documents that will be used and where necessary add them to the testing pack. A certain amount of cooperation will be required to create end-to-end tests. E.g. Sales into Debtors.

- Process flows should be documented together with sample test data. Notes can be added to explain why certain processes take place and what effect they might have downstream on other users. This will help ensure that business processes work as expected after the upgrade goes Live.

- Ask your ACS-Embrace account manager to document your customisations and identify those that are redundant. Add additional tests to check these functions thoroughly. Add notes to your test cases explaining what these customisations do and the knock-on effects they may have.

- Printer settings may need to be changed to avoid interfering with Live processing. Ensure that test documents produced are not automatically emailed to customers or suppliers. These settings should also be documented.

- Consider setting the next numbering to a different number range so as to make it easy to identify test documents produced. In addition to Job function testing, Day-end and Month-end procedures need to be tested, as well as any automated procedures that are in place.

- Create signoff sheets that testers can use to submit results to controllers.

- Once the test cases have been created assign a different user, if possible, to run through the tests. It would also be helpful to keep note of the time taken to perform the tests as an aid to planning.

The benefits of a UAT process

Creating a formalised testing plan has a number of advantages:

- A well-documented test plan doubles up as system documentation and includes all process flows.

- All customisations are identified and specific tests are set out to verify the correct functioning of the customisations.

- Load sharing - Very often sites rely on senior staff or power users to test the system as 'they are the only ones that know how the system works'. If the test procedure has been documented, more tasks can be distributed to junior staff who can produce output and verify that the necessary tests have been performed successfully.

- Test results can be kept on file to prove to auditors that due process has been followed.

- Standard sample data simplifies the testing process and makes it easier to check the output of the test cases.

- Should problems still be encountered after go Live, the test cases can be reviewed and amended to ensure that these problem areas are properly tested in future.

- Documentation helps to preserve knowledge that is often lost when key personnel leave. We often encounter situations where nobody knows why a particular customisation or process is in place. Sometimes the reason is not immediately obvious as it only has an effect at Month-end or in another module.

This process does take time and effort to put together, but you will reap the rewards of quicker testing times and peace of mind that all testing has been performed as planned.

It is always easier to resolve a problem found when testing in a Demo environment than one found in a Live system.

Embrace version 14 is currently being implemented in a beta environment, so….. **Don't delay**…..start with your UAT process preparation today to ensure that you are not left behind and are ready to take full advantage of the next release of your Embrace ERP business solution!

Compelling Reasons to keep your ERP Software up-to-date:

- New version software enhancements will make it easier to increase operational efficiency and boost profitability

- Ensure on-going support and reduce security risks

- Keep business processes up-to-date

- Utilise best practices and remain a best-in-class business

- Extend business capabilities

- Allows your business to change and grow

- Improve competitive advantage as new versions enable businesses to be updated in line with the latest innovations, leveraging the increased opportunities

- Enhanced financial reporting enables businesses to increase the efficiency of their financial operations

Antalis Optimizes Embrace for Growth and Competitive Advantage

antalis EM
PRINT · OFFICE · GRAPHICS

Embrace enables Antalis to successfully:

- Sell thousands of variety of product line items
- Process 200,000 invoices per annum
- Make 800 deliveries per day throughout Southern Africa
- Manage a fleet travelling nearly 2 million kilometres per annum.

The Company

Antalis is one of the largest distributors of traditional printing, office and digital papers in the country, as well as a range of printing and finishing solutions, equipment and consumables (inks and plates), Visual Communication media for the Sign and Display Industry, Industrial Packaging supplies and Logistic Solutions.

In addition Antalis provides Logistic Solutions to other industries and operates through sales and warehousing operations in all 6 major regions across Southern Africa, with a significant operation in Botswana.

Antalis South Africa (Pty) Ltd forms part of the Antalis International Group which is fully owned by Sequana, listed on the Premier Marche of the Paris Stock Exchange and operates in 44 countries worldwide.

Wiggins Teape, as Antalis was first known, was the first company to implement the ACS-Embrace ERP system, *in 1986.* *"Since then we have gone through several system upgrades, with Embrace constantly being enhanced. Each has resulted in huge jumps in productivity and efficiency. Embrace has grown, evolved and adapted to the ever changing business requirements of Antalis and has remained a world class ERP software solution."* – Alwyn Miller – National I.T. Manager.

The Challenge

There are different, divisions and sectors within the group and Antalis recognised that in order to address and embrace all their unique and diverse requirements they needed a scalable, flexible, fully integrated ERP solution. A key requirement was the ability to report separately on the profitability of each segment.

Antalis has a large telesales team, necessitating really fast transaction input! Salespeople need to be able to check real-time stock status, create quotes and automatically convert these to sales orders, delivery notes and invoices. The system would also need to track all sales per salesperson and calculate commissions.

Antalis is Forest Stewardship Council® certified and therefore has to provide traceability of the origin and chain of custody of their papers from source to end user.

Being located throughout Southern Africa, bandwidth requirements and costs are a significant consideration.

To meet the Antalis promise of delivering fast, high levels of customer service, system uptime needs to be 100% with full visibility throughout the supply chain.

Antalis has a printer sales and service division, offering warranties and full maintenance contracts. They had no means of managing and measuring the profitability of each contract.

The Solution

Antalis implemented the fully integrated Embrace end-to-end ERP Solution.

Greater efficiencies

The distribution centres in Durban and Cape Town, as well as all the branches are running on Embrace, from a central server, based at Head Office in Johannesburg. *"Today, the software is utilised by 230 concurrent users who apply the full force of all the Embrace modules, including accounting, sales, inventory management, WMS, Supply Chain, Service & Maintenance Contracts, CRM and ODBC solutions to bring greater efficiencies to Antalis,"* says Alwyn Miller, National IT Manager, who particularly lauds the limitless functionality, robustness and reliability of the system. **"System uptime is 100%!"**

Cost effective bandwidth

Embrace takes advantage of modern technology, with cost efficient hardware architecture and runs on 64K lines with 128K lines between the branches. Other solutions are bandwidth intensive whereas the Embrace Terminal interface is lean, delivers high network performance and reliability, while keeping bandwidth costs to a minimum.

The integrated Embrace Sales Module gives sales staff instant and easy access to all the information they need when speaking to customers. Sales calls and activities can be logged with ease, existing quotes and orders recalled and new quotes entered. Sales staff can look at the current stock levels in Embrace, with a breakdown to show where the stock is held and how much is available for their customers. Transaction input in Embrace is really fast, enabling sales people to service customers speedily and efficiently.

First company in South Africa to embrace a full WMS with RF barcode scanners

Antalis was the very **first company in South Africa** to implement a ground breaking full warehouse management system **(WMS) with RF barcode scanners**, enabling them to accurately track of every stock item, speed order turnaround times and meet their promise of a door-to-door delivery within 4 hours of an order being placed. *"That is correct! Our customer places an order and within 4 hours his goods are delivered to his doorstep! This dedication to fast delivery makes accurate order tracking a must,"* states Miller.

Increase warehouse productivity and eliminate the night shift

The warehouse is 20,000 square metres large and stock takes were long, manual and labour intensive. Embrace enabled Antalis to streamline its warehouse operation and stocktaking procedures. They are able to scan the whole warehouse in one Saturday morning, as opposed to an entire weekend, which is a huge benefit. Shrinkage has reduced and is now minimal. Embrace provides full traceability of products and full documentation which is a requirement of FSC® standard. *"Warehouse efficiency and productivity increased and we were even able to do away with our night shift!"* continues Miller.

Automated route sheets & POD's

Embrace enables Antalis to create load schedules, delivery manifests, routes and stop sequences, itemising the number of parcels and weight per invoice. This route optimisation and vehicle load balancing helps lower transport costs and increase productivity. The route sheets are used by drivers to obtain signatures for receipt of goods, creating a Proof of Delivery against those items which have been signed for, along with any comments which the customer has written, for future reference.

Instant Proof of Delivery Recall

Proof of delivery or collection and FSC® claim on invoices can be recalled at any time and emailed, faxed or printed and posted to the customer, complete with signatures captured at the point of delivery. This indisputable proof of delivery has helped to reduce customer delivery disputes and returns. Antalis has been able to increase cash flow by reducing time between delivery and invoicing enabling earlier billing against confirmed deliveries and collections.

Manage and measure the profitability of each machine and maintenance contract

Antalis has an equipment sales, service and repairs division and recently implemented the Embrace Service and Maintenance Contracts Modules to help sell, manage and control maintenance contracts. They are now able to track and monitor the profitability of each machine, with individual printers and components being tracked by serial number. All parts, warranty work, outwork and labour are recorded against each service job enabling Antalis to accurately measure the profitability of each maintenance contract. In addition, the software's numerous query screens helped the Antalis customer service division to experience a dramatic increase in efficiency. *"We have been able to reduce returnable equipment losses and gain greater business insight with advanced management reporting capabilities,"* explains Miller.

The Benefits

Customisation ensures competitive edge

"The biggest benefit is that we can customise Embrace to meet all our needs and give us our competitive edge!"

Antalis believes that the ability to customise a standard off-the-shelf package without the need for major bespoke programming is a major benefit. Antalis, along with all ACS-Embrace clients, owns the source code and are able to customise the package themselves. When training or assistance is required, expertise is close at hand, with ACS-Embrace being a local company and "just up the road."

Superior service and support

"Embrace Support is excellent and our Account Manager has made a huge impact on the business. He has become a well-respected and sought after member of our team, offering thought leadership, advice and overall, adding a lot of value." – Alwyn Miller, National IT Manager

Invaluable to everyday operations

Antalis are so impressed with their Embrace solution that they are assisting ACS with customer visits and welcoming other companies to their Warehouse in Selby to demonstrate how invaluable Embrace is to their everyday operations. *"Embrace is world class with limitless functionality. Compared to other ERP solutions we looked at, Embrace is extremely user friendly. We are very pleased with the system and the users are happy, having used it for so many years,"* continues Miller.

Return on investment

Antalis believes that Embrace has paid for itself, many times over, in terms of access to real-time information, fast and efficient customer service, laboursaving, productivity gains, operational efficiency, growth and profitability.

Streamline our business processes and consolidate financial reporting

According to Neelesh Kalidas, Financial Director, *"ACS-Embrace has been instrumental in assisting us to streamline our business processes and consolidate financial reporting. Embrace provides access to consolidated real-time information for on-demand decision making and has been pivotal in the controls it provides from a financial and ledger point of view."*

He further explains that this has assisted Antalis to provide accurate and on-time figures to their local board as well as reporting to their parent company in Paris.

Another major benefit to Antalis is the drill-down capabilities of the ledger and the downloads into Excel.

Increase cash flow

The streamlined debtors' module gives Antalis the assurance that their client statements will be correct and delivered on time via email or faxing, ensuring prompt payment and increased cash flow.

"Embrace's flexibility, user-friendliness and open architecture have directly enhanced Antalis' ability to grow and remain competitive in a tough economy. The speed with which we can react to customer demands and market changes has evolved us into a very agile business." – Neelesh Kalidas – Financial Director
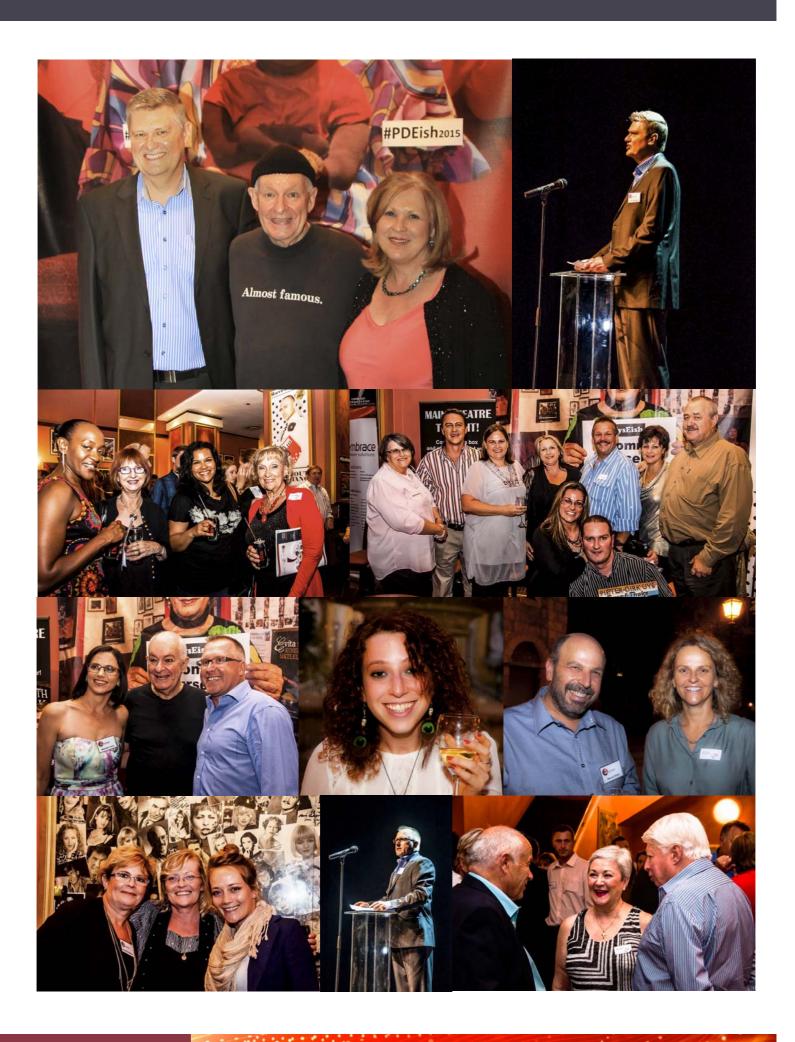
ACS-Embrace 30th Anniversary Celebration
Paying Tribute to those who made it Possible - You!

ACS-Embrace's momentous **three-decade anniversary** was celebrated in style with champagne, cocktails, scrumptious cuisine and **"An Audience with Pieter-Dirk Eish"** at Monte Casino. The evening was fun, festive and extremely entertaining.

Thank you for joining us at this commemorative occasion where we celebrated not only the longevity of the company but also the staff, clients and business partners who made it all possible. We trust you enjoyed your evening with us and look forward to our ongoing successful partnership for years to come as we continue to deliver beyond solutions.

EXPO Update

Embrace – the exact match for the auto industry

Above, from left to right:

Harneet Luther   - Executive Director – Tata
Viv Wright   - Sales Executive – ACS
Madhu Singh   - Area Manager Sales
   Tata Southern Africa

Above, from left to right:

Jeanette Teles   - Embrace Marketing
Geoffrey du Plessis   - Managing Director
   MAN Truck & Bus
   (S.A.) (Pty) Ltd