

Case Study:

Under Armour Improves Performance of SAP Master Data Loading with Automate Studio

The Company

Founded in 1996 by former University of Maryland football player Kevin Plank, Under Armour is a major innovator in performance apparel. The company made its start by developing a moisture-wicking compression T-shirt for athletes to wear underneath uniforms or pads. Under Armour now designs, markets, and distributes a full line of apparel and footwear for active men and women of all ages, and the company is the official outfitter for college and professional teams across North America and Europe.

Business Challenge

Under Armour went live with SAP in 2006, when the company's line of apparel was still relatively small. "The organization has grown significantly since then, but our IT staff has remained about the same size," explains Steve Walker, Manager of Supply Chain Systems. "Anybody familiar with SAP knows that it's data-intensive. It can drive your business, but it requires a lot of data to make those processes work. Our growth meant that we were dealing with more data than ever."

Twice a year, the company undergoes a seasonal product creation process that requires a massive data transfer from the company's product development system into SAP. While a single team member oversaw this master material creation process, an additional 10 production planners were required to leave their day-to-day jobs to help create materials over a grueling two-week period. "This seasonal ritual was a major bottleneck in terms of productivity, so we started looking at ways that we could automate MM01 transactions," says Walker. "We could write a custom program internally, but that would be difficult and expensive to design and maintain. We could automate scripts using the SCAT transaction in SAP, but that's not a transaction that most end-users can run. We realized that we needed an automated solution that would take some of the burden off of our IT group and put the power back in end-users' hands."

Client

Under Armour

Industry

Performance apparel

Challenges

- Errors and omissions in master data created
- Automate MM01 transactions
- Relieve IT of data-entry burden
- Put power back in end-users' hands

Solution

Automate Studio

Results

- Speed seasonal data transfer by 80%
- Create ad hoc fixes in far less time

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Steve Walker

Manager of Supply Chain Systems

Solution

Walker and his team first saw a Automate Studio demo when attending an Apparel and Footwear Solution (AFS) user group. "We were impressed with how easily you could create scripts in Automate Studio, then hand those scripts over to end-users for execution," he says. "The Automate Studio support team even gave us an orientation prior to purchasing the product, helping us write scripts for the material creation transaction. When we moved forward with the purchase, we were all set to run transactions from day one."

Under Armour immediately applied Automate Studio to the seasonal product creation process. The IT department loaded the scripts, trained the business side how to run it, and left the rest in end-users' hands. "Once we created the scripts and tested them, the business side controlled the process entirely," notes Walker. Since then, the IT department has used Automate Studio for several other master data challenges, including integration with new tax software that requires the transfer of hundreds of thousands of master records. "That task would've required a custom program in the past," says Walker. "But with Automate Studio, we ran a few scripts concurrently and got through it in no time."

Results

Automate Studio streamlined Under Armour's seasonal product creation process, reducing manual data entry by 80% while empowering end-users to run data transfers without excessive IT intervention. "Prior to using Automate Studio, we would need 550 to 600 person-hours to transfer the data from our product development system into SAP," says Walker. "Now we have it down to 112 hours, meaning that the entire process takes just two days instead of 10." Automate Studio delivers even more benefits in the follow-up transactions, which link the material creation process to specific vendors so that Under Armour can determine lead times for its products. "The followup transactions used to require one person to spend three days entering data," says Walker. "Now the same process requires about 10 minutes of run time. All things considered, Automate Studio paid for itself within a single season."

After using Automate Studio to speed the seasonal product creation process, the Under Armour IT staff still found itself dealing with a number of ad hoc programming requests. "When you're doing mass maintenance, you can't always use the MM17 transaction," notes Walker. "That means you need to manually set a different value for each of your SAP materials. But with Automate Studio, you can create ad hoc fixes in far less time. So we can react more nimbly as an IT nd we can keep our team lean and productive."

Future plans

With a steadily growing product line, the IT team at Under Armour will continue to find new ways to automate data transfer for increasingly complex SAP business processes. For instance, if Under Armour wants to move finished product from one warehouse to another, an employee must manually create very large stock transport POs in SAP. "A single PO of that type can take one person an entire day," says Walker. "But with Automate Studio, we could automate the creation of those POs in SAP based on a business warehouse report. That's just one of many ways that Automate Studio can keep saving us significant time and money."

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