

C.H. Briggs builds a better relationship with its customers



Gaining a 360-degree view of clients with Inforce and IBM

Overview

The need

C.H. Briggs, a leading provider of specialty building materials, wanted to differentiate itself from the competition by fostering customer intimacy, and needed a powerful infrastructure to support this.

The solution

Became the first adopter of Inforce, running on an IBM® Power® 720 Express server on the IBM i operating system.

The benefit

Supports two-way integration between ERP and CRM, providing a 360-degree view of customers. Reduces physical server footprint by 50 percent. Cuts nightly backup window by 40 percent.

Founded over 50 years ago, C. H. Briggs is a third generation, family-owned and professionally managed business, and is one of the largest independently-owned distributors of specialty building materials on the east coast of the United States. The company has grown from just a hardware distributor to add a wide range of interior specialty building materials to its offering. C.H. Briggs now provides over 40,000 products including hardware, board and panel products and premium surfaces, partnering with more than 200 suppliers to serve thousands of customers. Conducting business through four distribution centers on the east coast, C. H. Briggs has its headquarters in Reading, Pennsylvania.

Standing out from the competition

Change and innovation are central tenets in C.H. Briggs' core values, illustrated by the company's ongoing commitment to the early adoption of technology. As a result, the C.H. Briggs IT team is continually challenged to find new ways to gain that all-important competitive edge.

Scott Withers, Chief Information Officer at C.H. Briggs explains: "Many of our competitors choose to differentiate themselves by focusing on operational efficiency. Strategically we feel that to be successful, we needed to shift the basis on which we compete to a more customer-centric strategy, while still preserving the foundation of being operationally excellent.

"C.H. Briggs has always maintained exceptional relationships with our customers, and we realized that capturing information gained while engaging with clients and combining this with traditional ERP could provide unprecedented insight into their behavior and preferences. This would give us the tools to maximize quality of service, setting us apart from the pack. The challenge was to find the software and hardware to support this ambitious goal."



Solution Components

Hardware

- IBM® Power® 720 Express

Software

- IBM i version 6.2
- Inforce
- Infor Distribution A+
- Salesforce CRM

IBM Business Partner

- Distributed Systems Services, Inc.
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Investing in innovation

The company relies on Infor Distribution A+ to automate core processes, including inventory management, order entry, financial management and sales operations across its four distribution centers. When Infor announced the release of the Inforce application – designed to share real-time data between Infor Distribution A+ and Salesforce CRM – C.H. Briggs’ pioneering spirit made them first in line to try out the new solution.

“While today’s economy has made many wary of change, we think that now, more than ever, is the time to make forward-looking investments,” comments Withers. “Social networking and mobility technology is flourishing, so we asked ourselves – how much more powerful could our organization be if we incorporated this kind of thinking into our business? We felt that Inforce offered the ideal vehicle for this, we just needed to make sure we had a powerful server platform in place that could handle the exciting new developments we were planning.”

Laying the foundations

Working with its preferred partner of almost 15 years, Distributed Systems Services, Inc., an IBM Premier Business Partner, C.H. Briggs became the first company in the world to implement Inforce. The application runs on the company’s existing IBM Power 720 Express server running the IBM i operating system. Based on six-core POWER7 processors, the Power 720 server offers leadership performance and energy efficiency.

“We have relied on IBM Power Systems running IBM i for years, as we feel IBM solutions have truly withstood the test of time, reaching new heights of performance while never compromising on stability,” says Withers. “As a result, the IBM Power 720 Express server was our number one choice to support our new Inforce implementation. When dealing with leading edge software such as Inforce you need to have confidence in your server platform – IBM Power Systems gives us that.”

Seeing the difference

The Infor solution supported by IBM hardware supports innovative new ways of working, enabling C.H. Briggs to embed customer information in every aspect of the business. For example, the company’s sales representatives now have each customer’s full purchasing history at their fingertips, helping tailor the sales process to that specific client’s tastes and preferences. The ability to run root-cause analyses of any issues aids C.H. Briggs in uncovering opportunities to boost performance and maximize the quality of top-level decisions.

“Upgrading to the IBM Power 720 Express server reduces our physical footprint by more than 50 percent compared to our previous Power Systems server. The decrease in maintenance and software licensing costs has been so significant it has almost covered the cost of the upgrade. And the effect of greater processing power is clear – our nightly backup window has been cut by 40 percent.”

— Scott Withers, Chief Information Officer,
C.H. Briggs

These changes are expected to help C.H. Briggs grow its customer base, gain greater share of wallet, and increase customer retention rates. To make this possible, the company needs a scalable infrastructure in place to accommodate future growth. Taking advantage of Capacity on Demand from IBM Power Systems™ enables C.H. Briggs to dynamically adjust processor and memory resources to suit demand, scaling up with minimal disruption to the business.

“Capacity on Demand from IBM Power Systems is an ideal solution for businesses like ours, where we have aggressive growth plans and like to move fast on opportunities,” comments Withers. “We hope that the competitive edge we have gained by deploying Inforce will result in more demand for our services, and choosing IBM Power Systems allows us to be ready for this.”

Improving the bottom line

Since deploying the IBM Power 720 Express server, C.H. Briggs has seen a host of savings, including reduced maintenance, software licensing and floor space costs. The company has also experienced a significant reduction in the time taken for backups each night.

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Withers concludes: “The strategic alliance between Infor and IBM and the tight integration between their solutions is a huge advantage to C.H. Briggs, and one we are confident about capitalizing on well into the future. Our latest Infor implementation supported by the IBM Power Systems platform is proving the key to getting to know our customers better, making us a more responsive and effective enterprise.”

For more information

To learn more about the alliance between IBM and Infor, contact your IBM sales representative or IBM Business Partner, or visit us at: ibm.com/solutions/alliance

To learn more about Distributed Systems Services, Inc., visit: www.dssc corp.com



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