

Mercedes-Benz U.S. International, Inc.

Profile

Mercedes-Benz U.S. International, Inc. (MBUSI) is accustomed to pioneering new technologies. Its Vance, Alabama factory is Mercedes-Benz first U.S. manufacturing plant, where the luxurious M-Class Sport Utility Vehicle is assembled. Everything is under one roof, from Body, Paint, and Assembly shops to Administration, emphasizing the teamwork that goes into making the top-performing car. The company motto is "Nothing but the best for our customer. Let's do our best together."

The M-Class is built "just-in-time," a manufacturing method based on keeping inventory at minimal levels, skillfully planned to meet exact requirements. For example, in the Assembly shop, there is about two hours of inventory in stock, and the Body shop receives three deliveries per shift. When additional supplies are needed, the automated system places the order, which is delivered almost immediately.

Mercedes-Benz has initiated a "factory delivery program," so clients can see for themselves how quality and world-class engineering are built into their cars. That same dedication to quality is also apparent in the way MBUSI manages compliance with the stringent regulatory environment in which it operates.

The Challenge

The auto industry must comply with a myriad of regulatory, legal, and business-related record-keeping requirements. "We're in the business of building cars, not creating paper," reports Assistant Manager of Information Technology, Bill Engelke. "Still, we must keep meticulous documentation on everything from emissions for EPA standards to our ISO certification. As a new company, we soon realized that our initial ad hoc, manual ways of filing critical information would not work in the long term."

By early 1999, MBUSI had chosen Lotus Domino.Doc as its standard document management system, based on the success of a pilot program to

manage 20,000 drawings for Facilities Engineering. "The users became dependent on the system," says Engelke. "We could see the benefits of extending it for record retention. But the technology wasn't ready. We had to work with our vendors to improve it and add features."

Along with Lotus and their partner, Xerox Connect, Engelke had long-term working relationships with Cobra Technologies and Xerox. He enlisted them all as a team to integrate and implement his vision – a customized system to help MBUSI staff manage records electronically, including the ability to scan hard copy documents directly into the Domino.Doc environment. "We were looking to reduce the labor involved both in complying with record retention policies as well as locating records after they had been filed."



"We are required to keep meticulous records. We needed a customized solution to help us comply with the law, give team members access to important information when and where they need it, and reduce the labor involved in compliance."

Bill Engelke
Assistant Manager of
Information Technology
Mercedes-Benz U.S.
International, Inc.



The Solution

There wasn't an off-the-shelf solution that would easily meet MBUSI's needs. "We tried a number of different approaches, with limited success," says Engelke. As a systems integrator with solid experience in Lotus applications, Xerox Connect took the lead in analyzing requirements, costs, applications, and a strategy to handle 1200 different document types – which included installing 46 Document Centres. "When we saw Document Centre, we knew we had a big part of the ultimate solution," Engelke reports.

The "ultimate solution," dubbed KnowledgeShare by creators Xerox and Lotus, consists of the Document Centre at the front end, Cobra Image Router as the "middleware," and Lotus Notes messaging and Domino.Doc document management systems as the electronic document repository. Xerox Connect supplied the technical muscle required to integrate the components into an efficient, easy-to-use solution. At a Document Centre, KnowledgeShare users scan hard copy documents directly into Domino.Doc, allowing instantaneous capture, and keyword searchable access and retrieval of mission-critical records.

"There was no other solution compatible with Domino.doc," Engelke says. "Xerox was the first out of the gate with a solution compatible with our requirements." Additionally, Xerox Business Services provides four on-site specialists to maintain the Document Centres, as well as manage MBUSI's mail center.

The Results

Bill Engelke's approach is to introduce the KnowledgeShare solution gradually, department by department, so people can see the benefits themselves. Not surprisingly, the IT Department took the lead. "We're planning a major expansion of the plant, and we've got a lot to keep track of – business process designs, procedures, and documentation. We're big proponents of the system," according to Engelke.

Other early KnowledgeShare adopters at MBUSI include departments directly impacted by regulations and government audits. "Our emissions lab is a big user," says Engelke. "Hard copy calibration and test reports are generated by testing equipment in the lab. They scan those reports and capture the data into our records system immediately."

As an ISO certified enterprise, MBUSI also plans to use KnowledgeShare to manage the extensive documentation required to support their certification. "We're expected to have a written procedure on every business process," Engelke says. "Now we have a consistent way of managing our records retention process for ISO."

As for day-to-day operations, Engelke is extremely pleased with Document Centre's performance. Not only has MBUSI eliminated 82 standalone machines, "The asset consolidation has reduced expenses significantly and saves valuable space," he claims. "Document Centre's reliability is a big improvement, and the financials definitely work in our favor. Our cost per page is far less, and we've cut supplies and maintenance costs. And Xerox people take care of everything on site, which is a big convenience."

Benefits Summary

MBUSI is beginning to reap the benefits of pioneering the KnowledgeShare solution. "This technology is part of our ongoing continuous improvement program. It cuts labor and improves record retention compliance," Bill Engelke reports. "In today's business environment, capturing, accessing, and sharing critical documentation has never been more important. This solution is quite elegant." By bringing scanning and distribution capabilities to knowledge workers themselves, KnowledgeShare fosters collaboration and brings the concept of instant information access anytime, anywhere, a step closer to reality. Xerox acknowledges the leadership of MBUSI and is proud and pleased to have earned a place in this visionary partnership.



We could not find a solution until Xerox, Xerox Connect, Cobra, and Lotus helped us customize one compatible with our requirements."

Bill Engelke

Assistant Manager of Information Technology
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