

Customer Success Story

Northern Rail



Integrated SAP® Support Services

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Fay Hudson, SAP Business Manager, Northern Rail

The challenge

With almost 5,000 employees, Northern Rail has a significant number of users accessing its SAP® system at any given time. Northern Rail uses SAP for its key business systems - finance, HR, payroll, materials management and supplier relationship management, therefore, it is imperative that it is updated, reliable and well managed.

Absoft's response - flexible, consistent support

In 2011 Northern Rail chose Absoft as its functional and technical SAP support partner after a rigorous selection process. Fay Hudson, Northern Rail's SAP Business Manager said: “We were very impressed with the quality of Absoft's overall support package; key factors in our decision were access to Absoft's specialist SAP expertise and the flexibility of Absoft's service, which allows us to amend our support requirements to fit our business needs.”

The support services are provided remotely by Absoft's specialist team of consultants based at its UK headquarters in Aberdeen, initially through a support model based around a bank of hours that can be consumed on demand, with additional top-ups purchased when required for peak periods.

Consultants are assigned for the long term to Absoft's dedicated support centre, developing a solid understanding of each client's systems and business processes and providing a high level of service continuity.

According to Fay Hudson, “Provision of consistent consultants is a key area of strength in the service we receive from Absoft. The consultants really know our business and we feel that the service we receive is akin to having remote Northern Rail employees working with us on our SAP system, which is especially important when it comes to critical payroll support.

Ms. Hudson continued: “Fast turnaround times are important to us and we've also been very impressed with the speed of response from Absoft which is based on an agreed Service Level Agreement.”

Customer background



Northern Rail plays a key role in the transportation of tens of thousands of people throughout the north of England every day. The company, which runs 313 trains stopping at more than 500 stations daily, aims to offer its customers a reliable and friendly train service.

Northern Rail is the largest train operator in the UK - more than 4,900 employees are involved in providing nearly 2,500 local and regional train services every weekday.

The company was formed in December 2004 when its parent companies won the franchise contract (awarded by the UK Government) to operate train services in the north of England until April 2014.

Northern Rail is owned by a 50:50 joint venture between international services company Serco Group plc and Abellio – a subsidiary of NS Dutch Railways.



Budget certainty with fixed cost SAP NetWeaver® Support

When the initial support contract came up for renewal Northern Rail confirmed Absoft as its trusted SAP support advisor. Absoft continues to provide remote functional support through its flexible support model; however, Northern Rail opted for an additional technical support agreement.

Fay Hudson explained: "We were looking for a way to predict the costs of technical support and opted for Absoft's SAP NetWeaver® Managed Service. The service is provided at a fixed price, which is tailored to our requirements providing us with the budget forecasting accuracy we require."

Under the SAP NetWeaver® Managed Service Absoft allocates a dedicated team to take responsibility for the technical support of SAP systems. The service provides specialist technical support, monitoring, patching and maintenance of Northern Rail's SAP landscape.

Carefully monitoring supported systems 24/7 is key to Absoft's methodology facilitating a proactive approach where problems are resolved before they develop into significant issues. Monitoring is automated, reducing cost by removing the need for manual checks and allowing Absoft's team to focus on adding value through improved availability, smoother operations, and lower controlled costs for Northern Rail.

Because Absoft takes responsibility for the support systems, a maintenance plan has been produced for Northern Rail's systems to enable a proactive approach to updates and maintenance. This was created by Absoft, but was fully agreed with Northern Rail and forms the basis of planning for support activities



An integrated support service from a trusted SAP partner

Since the commencement of the support contract, the relationship between Northern Rail and Absoft has strengthened, with the train operator making use of Absoft's expertise for SAP-related advice around other technical services such as upgrades and hardware migrations – delivered through its Integrated Support Services division.

Asked about Absoft's ability to play a key role in ensuring Northern Rail continues to get the best return from its SAP investment Fay Hudson concluded: "We have a true partner in Absoft - they provide valuable advice on where we should be going next, looking at our business requirements and highlighting a number of worked examples of what the future could look like based on the different scenarios. Their ability to demo different SAP solutions on a trial basis is perfect in helping us to make best for business decisions."

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