



Oninit Case Study – PEP Ltd

Client: Pan European Potato Enterprise Ltd

Key challenge: To provide the ongoing support, enhancements and maintenance of the back-office systems running on Informix that are crucial to the on-time delivery success of exported perishables.



Pan European Potato Enterprise (PEP) Ltd is a leading producer and exporter of seed and table potatoes, delivering to a growing global market; it is also an importer of new potatoes and onions. The majority of its seed potato production takes place in Scotland, an ideal geography for providing high-quality, limited-generation seed. PEP markets more than 70,000 metric tonnes of potatoes every season to 20 countries worldwide.

Exporting such high volumes of products, particularly perishables, requires strategically planned and tightly controlled movement across international boundaries to ensure that products are delivered safely and on time to customers as far away as Thailand. To do this, PEP relies on the skills and experience of Oninit to support, enhance and maintain its crucial back-office systems.

Oninit rewrites PEP's entire system

PEP has a long-established relationship with Oninit. About ten years ago, PEP inherited a UNIX-based management system running an Informix database and called upon Oninit to reinvent it in order to meet its current specification. Four years later, PEP called on Oninit again when it realised a more flexible and web-based system was needed. PEP continues to rely on Oninit for development and support to this day.

PEP uses this system to provide important documentation to accompany exports for the importing countries and shipping lines. The data that goes into the database comes out in the form of various reports, such as sales invoices, proforma invoices, shipping instructions, haulier information, validation notices for numerous official bodies, departure notifications and so on. Guidelines surrounding the documentation required to release shipments around the world are now more stringent than ever, and the list of countries importing British potatoes is growing thanks to the quality of seed and consumption potatoes produced by dedicated export companies like PEP.

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– Vincent Lumb, Seed Manager, PEP Ltd

Vincent Lumb, Seed Manager of PEP, explained: “We needed more reporting functionality and information out, a system with more flexibility that would allow us to pull statistics out from different years and to produce different reports for a myriad of requirements. We were informed that Engine would better suit our needs, but we wanted the system to be rewritten based on our original concept. A long-term customer of Oninit, we called on them again to develop a new web-based system and incorporate our ideas. Oninit worked closely with us to come up with the system we needed.”

The original system was written using web datablade and was supported over the internet using a web browser. Oninit upgraded this system and rewrote the application in Java using the Engine tool, giving PEP the flexibility it needed.

Oninit’s ongoing support is crucial to on-time delivery

PEP continues to use Oninit for the ongoing development, support and enhancements to this next generation of its application and the Informix database sitting behind it. Its support is critical to PEP’s export success.

“Product quality can quickly deteriorate during handling and transport if inappropriate conditions and practices are used. During their journey, our shipments can experience a variety of environments and conditions that could jeopardise their quality and on-time delivery to our customers. However, problems can be minimised and quality maintained with the use of a system that can make sure all documentation is ready and available to facilitate the swift debarkation of our containers,” explained Vincent. “As with any perishables, timing is critical. You can’t store seed for long so you can’t have a shipment of perishables sitting on the docks. Having the right documentation in place to accompany each shipment is paramount, and it has to be ready in plenty of time to clear goods and facilitate a timely delivery. We rely on our system running smoothly and being up to date and we rely on Oninit to make that happen.”

“In our business, shipping lines are constantly changing,” he continued. “They are always asking us for more data. As little as two years ago we could just pick up the phone and issue instructions, but port security has increased and now everything has to be in writing or requires a special reference like a booking reference number. Every time there is a change to a regulation or requirement, it necessitates a modification to our database, usually a new database field or reporting function. We know we can rely on Oninit to respond and turn this around quickly and efficiently, so that our customers’ expectations are never compromised.”

Informix ties all information together

Prior to using Informix, the Oninit-written application and Oninit’s support, PEP relied on an individual in the company who would keep a record on a database on their own PC. PEP knew it just couldn’t continue like this. “There was too much overlap and too much time spent on data entry,” said Vincent, “and we couldn’t guarantee the information was accurate. With offices around the UK, in Spain and the Canaries, we all have different information to track at different times, from pick-up instructions to transport company instructions to handling instructions and conditions; the database has to satisfy the diverse needs of each country. Informix gives us a single point of data capture and we all have access to the same information.”



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PEP uses the database to tie everything together; it ships all over the world, and handling about 70,000 metric tonnes a season is no small task. The export of seed potatoes runs from August to March, the rest of the year is importing the results – it is an ongoing cycle of export and import that has to be managed in a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week operation. PEP has to be able to clear cargo at all ports it exports to; in the perishables industry, timing is everything.

Said Vincent: “We are happy with Informix and the system Oninit developed and we are happy with the support. As it stands we have found nothing else that you can buy off-the-shelf to do this job as well; Oninit does everything we ask them to do.”

About Oninit

Oninit was founded in 1999 as a specialist Informix developer and consulting team, and since that time has grown into a leading Informix services company providing a range of Informix database and application development, support and training services to companies in the UK and across EMEA from its base in Cirencester, UK.

Informix is deeply embedded in the enterprise IT systems of many thousands of companies worldwide. Oninit provides the vital Informix technical support and development services which are required by these complex systems.

Oninit helps companies to develop new Informix applications as well as support, enhance, integrate and modernise applications running on older installations. It works with customers to upgrade and modernise these to take maximum advantage of the latest Informix technical enhancements and additions, ensuring a roadmap for their future IT or establishing an evolutionary path to more modern open or virtualised architectures.

More information can be found at www.oninitgroup.com

About PEP Ltd

Pan European Potato Enterprise Ltd is predominantly involved in the growing and marketing of seed and table potatoes for export. It provides high-quality limited-generation seed to its customers.

PEP markets about 70,000 metric tonnes every season to more than twenty countries worldwide with its associated company in Spain, PepSur marketing. It is the leading exporter to the Canary Islands and Spain.

PEP is a silver sustaining partner of the World Potato Congress, a member of the British Potato Trade Association, a member of Pre Basic Growers Association and a member of the British Society of Plant Breeders.

More information can be found at www.pep-eu.com/



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