

Redwood Business Solutions

Making complex processes easy to manage.

At A Glance

Industry

- Fashion retail and wholesale

Environment

- SAP® R/3® IS-Retail, SAP FICO, SAP SD, SAP BW, SAP XI
- Java based EPOS system
- Retail, wholesale and data warehouse applications
- IBM System i5 (AS/400)
- Windows
- Automated warehouse picking equipment

Key Challenges

- Inefficient manual control
- Need to move to unattended operations
- Unpredictable process completion times

The Solution

- SAP Central Process Scheduling by Redwood automating business critical SAP and non-SAP workload
- Automatic SMS notification of workload completion

Key Benefits

- Unattended overnight workload automation
- Increased agility in responding to business requirements
- Early notification of exceptions
- Improved help desk and user support facilities



FRENCH CONNECTION

French Connection implements 'lights out' operation, improves business agility and delivers reliable management information with SAP Central Process Scheduling by Redwood

Faced with the need to implement unattended overnight operations to improve cost effectiveness, French Connection needed a reliable solution to support their complex SAP, non-SAP and multi-platform processing. SAP Central Process Scheduling provided the answer.



The French Connection Group is one of today's most successful and widely recognized fashion brands. Founded in London in 1969, French Connection designs, produces and distributes clothing for men, women and children to more than 30 countries around the world through a network of branded retail stores and licensed franchises.

The Group's approach to managing the business is to ensure that resources are deployed in the most efficient manner to support elements of the business that have a direct impact on trading. The pursuit of efficiency also applies to the underlying IT infrastructure and French Connection have implemented an advanced Java based EPOS application at their 80 stores in the UK, integrating into SAP R/3 on an IBM System i5 platform,

using SAP IS-Retail, Finance and Sales and Distribution modules. With large quantities of store data being transmitted every day, reliable overnight background processing is critical for timely stock replenishment and accurate management information.

"SAP Central Process Scheduling has provided us with a means for controlling our workload effectively and efficiently. The associated benefits, coupled with achieving our primary business goal of enabling unattended overnight operations, assure us that we selected the right solution."

Claire Joel
Development Manager,
French Connection

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The Need for Automation

Business growth made it apparent that background work was not being efficiently managed. The complexity of the workload meant that nothing had been automated since the original implementation of SAP. Overnight operators manually checked for arrival of data from the EPOS application and instigated subsequent processing. Significantly, manual intervention was required should failures occur.

The need for automation was evident; to improve the efficiency of the operation and to free up the cost of overnight resources for use elsewhere in the business. The overnight shift had to end.

Meeting the Business Need

With a clear picture of the requirements, French Connection contacted Redwood Software. Development Manager, Claire Joel explains: "Because we knew what was required it was very easy to identify the right solution. SAP Central Process Scheduling could interface intelligently into SAP and integrate automated processing across all our platforms". Especially important was support for the IBM System i5 servers running applications underpinning the retail and wholesale operations. Claire Joel continues: "IBM System i5 support was vital for us. The reliance on this platform in retail environments is well known, any solution had to not only support this platform but also match it for reliability and stability. We needed to see integration with SAP and direct communication with i5/OS before we could consider the solution suitable. SAP Central Process Scheduling provided both".

With SAP Central Process Scheduling able to manage the complex scheduling requirements, French Connection set about automating overnight and daytime processing and weekend reporting with event-driven, automated detection of incoming store data triggering schedules. Extensive use was made of features designed to control contention for system resources, ensuring maximum efficiency, and management of data transfer between IBM System i5 systems and the Windows based SAP BW system was implemented. The SAP Central Process Scheduling Job Chain Diagrammer graphical interface simplified management of complex chains of related processes.

Automating the workload went part of the way to removing the need for overnight staff. Additional capabilities completed the picture. SAP Central Process Scheduling enabled automated delivery of SMS messages to support staff on completion of certain tasks. If no message is received the support team know that a problem has occurred. The way was open to switch to fully unattended overnight operations.

Benefits of SAP Integration

French Connection are now more agile in responding to changing business requirements and can run some jobs during the day without impacting on-line user response times. Management of SAP reporting is also more flexible, for example using groups of reports that can be easily updated as reporting requirements change. Additionally the automation project provided an opportunity to start a review of how jobs are run, when and under what conditions.

SAP Central Process Scheduling support for SAP 'parent / child' processing has taken away the guesswork associated with running background workload, important with a daily processing requirement in the region of 800 to 1000 jobs, unattended weekend runs involving some 600 jobs and major processing peaks at month

end. Reliable delivery of reports associated with these jobs ensures that business managers have the information they want when they need it.

Improved User Service

Implementing SAP Central Process Scheduling has enabled French Connection to reassign the cost of the overnight shift to increase the number of help desk staff, extend the hours of operation of the help desk and free up development staff for more productive work. This has contributed directly to an improvement in end-user service.

French Connection has expanded its use of SAP Central Process Scheduling to control and manage the transfer of information to and from Distrisorter automated warehouse picking equipment, increasing the value of the IT environment to the business. SAP Central Process Scheduling will also be used to further integrate the EPOS application with SAP by automating delivery of data direct from the stores into SAP through SAP NetWeaver XI – leading to a fully automated end-to-end business processing environment.

Claire Joel concludes: "We are able to delegate day to day management of background processing to our support team, who use the intuitive interface to monitor jobs. We can automate processing between our SAP and System i5 retail applications and integrate with the SAP BW application running on Windows. SAP Central Process Scheduling has provided us with a means for controlling our workload effectively and efficiently. The associated benefits, coupled with achieving our primary business goal of enabling unattended overnight operations, assure us that we selected the right solution."

