Sport-Thieme GmbH

CASE STUDY

Sport-Thieme GmbH

ERP archive in the cloud

Sport-Thieme GmbH is Germany's largest mail-order retailer for institutional sport, offering over 16,500 products for school sports, association sports, fitness and therapy. This family company, founded in 1949 and now in its third generation of management, has grown over the intervening decades from a small family operation in Lower Saxony to an international enterprise with over 380 employees across multiple sites all over Europe. To digitise its business processes and IT infrastructure for document management, Sport-Thieme uses Kendox InfoShare in the cloud under a SaaS model, integrating this ECM solution with its on-premises ERP solution, Microsoft Dynamics NAV.

Customer	– Sport-Thieme GmbH
	– Multiple locations across Europe
	– Approx. 380 employees
	– Approx. 16,500 items in product range
Industry	Online distance retail for sporting goods
Project	– Integrate Kendox Cloud Service with on-premises ERP (Microsoft Dynamics NAV)
	– Legally compliant archiving of incoming and outgoing documents
Requirements	– Run as SaaS solution
	– Managed service via external provider
	– Integrate SaaS solution with ERP application (on-premises)

Sport-Thieme gets the whole world moving. Be it football goalposts in Barbados, Snoezelen rooms in South Korea or ballet equipment in Norway, millions of people worldwide use Sport-Thieme's sports and exercise gear. In Europe in particular, customers benefit from online stores and a personalised product range and consulting service in their local language. This successful sporting goods retailer uses Kendox InfoShare as a document management solution for its contract and purchasing processes. This covers everything from archiving customers' documents and revision-safe storage of purchase invoices and costing documents, to automatic booking in the company's ERP and financial accounting system. After dismantling its old archive and migrating its data to the cloud, now both outgoing and incoming ERP documents are now archived to the Kendox Cloud Archive, where they can be accessed from within the ERP solution at any time. An interface with the cloud-based CRM solution Microsoft Dynamics 365 CE is also currently being implemented. The next step will be to digitise the delivery chain in the purchasing department.

"We wanted to make our systems as scalable as possible. In this context, Kendox InfoShare fits perfectly into our architecture."

Stefan Schmitz, CIO, head of IT and digital innovation

SWITCHING TO A MODERN IT ENVIRONMENT

The goal of the Kendox InfoShare project was to replace an existing DMS solution which was no longer guaranteed to be compatible with Sport-Thieme's ERP and accounting systems. "We didn't want to have to update our ERP and accounting systems just because we were doing our document management system at the same time," explained Stefan Schmitz, CIO and head of IT and digital innovation at Sport-Thieme. This prompted Schmitz, an established IT expert, to try to design the company's application environment in such a way that any future incompatibility between different software solutions would not impact on the IT department's operations. He also knew that Sport-Thieme needed a cloud-based archiving and document management system to replace the existing archive system. Once these goals were achieved, step two would then be to similarly automate the processing of invoices received digitally using a suitable approval workflow.

RUNNING IN THE CLOUD, HOSTED IN GERMANY

The new DMS solution needed to fulfil several different criteria for Sport-Thieme. The company wanted a cloud-based solution that could be operated off-site under a SaaS model, while offering open interfaces (Web-Service/SOAP/REST) and connectors to other software providers. Stefan Schmitz also wanted to decouple systems from one another and modularise the overall software environment. After a thoughtful and in-depth evaluation process, the retailer settled on the DMS/ECM platform Kendox InfoShare. Kendox, a Swiss software developer, was able to set itself apart from numerous domestic and international competitors. "Compared with the other solutions, Kendox met our needs the best, and we were able to integrate it seamlessly into our environment. That's exactly what we expect of a modern, agile software architecture," said Mr Schmitz.

Another point in Kendox's favour was that its data was hosted in Germany. While Kendox AG's head office is in fact located in Switzerland, its German subsidiary Kendox GmbH operates a virtual data centre where data is hosted.

STREAMLINED SYSTEM DESIGN, OPTIMISED PROCESSES

Process optimisation also played a role in helping Sport-Thieme settle on Kendox InfoShare as a cloud solution. As the head of IT and digital innovation, CIO Stefan Schmitz places particular value on integrating systems into the business so as to gradually increase and expand the degree of automation on the application side. To this end, employees should ideally only work with the application's front end, from where they can access all the information they need. This approach requires a DMS/ECM platform that enables all relevant functions via API interfaces. "We design our interfaces so we can operate software solutions with their standard settings," explained Schmitz. "This allows us to regularly install system updates, upgrades and patches without them getting in the way of our workflows and business processes."

DMS AT THE HEART OF THE SOFTWARE ARCHITECTURE

One particular goal of the Sport-Thieme implementation was to streamline user administration. Around 140 active and logged-in users work within the ERP system every day. Of these, around 20 per cent need access to the files in question – and on average, around 3,100 such files need to be processed every day. "However, only a few of our users work directly with the DMS system," explained Schmitz. "Mostly, these are our colleagues who operate the scanning workstations. The other users only access the archive via the API interface."

The users at the scanning stations have a client licence and are the only ones permitted to search the archive system directly with the help of Kendox's standard application. They index scanned documents and the documents'

associated metadata, so that they can then be found either using their index data or via full-text searching. As a result, not all 140 users need their own direct access to the document archive. Instead, the DMS acts as a 'document platform' at the heart of the system architecture. Users are managed using roles and defined interfaces: "Whenever you use a given interface, you can also only access a certain part of the archive system. For confidential areas, there is an extra API with corresponding credentials, which makes managing user permissions within the DMS really easy for us."

User permissions are thus controlled via their access to whichever other system they use to access the archive. In other words, if you have permission to view posted documents in this originating system, you have the same access rights for archived documents. If you don't have the right permission, the archive is inaccessible. This principle will eventually be extended to other leading systems, such as the CRM system and the customer-facing section of the web shop.

FAMILIAR FRONT END, NEW DMS IN THE BACKGROUND

As well as the locally operated ERP system Microsoft Dynamics NAV and the cloud-based CRM solution Microsoft Dynamics 365 CE, Sport-Thieme's logistics solution from EPG plays a central role. The goal for all of the leading applications at the company is for the DMS/ECM system to run in the background as a document platform, primarily ensuring revision-safe storage of documents generated by each individual application. Kendox InfoShare is therefore integrated in such a way that employees working in specialist departments do not need to access the DMS/ECM platform directly. Instead, they only do so indirectly, using their primary application. "The majority of our users don't use the front end of Kendox InfoShare," said Stefan Schmitz. "They wouldn't even recognise it if they saw it." "For us, this was another reason for choosing Kendox: that everything we could do via the primary interface could also be done from an external system using the InfoShare API."

HIGHLY FLEXIBLE, LITTLE MAINTENANCE REQUIRED

Sport-Thieme also receives a key element of added value thanks to the data being available in the cloud, with the operator taking responsibility for maintaining this software-as-a-service solution. "Because we are operating it as a SaaS solution, the DMS platform is much easier to scale up. Now, if we want to integrate a new country into our environment – for which we would need massively more document storage – then for us it's as simple as clicking a button to turn that on. Before, we always had to worry about whether we actually had enough storage space. And of course, our internal IT administrative processes have been significantly streamlined as a result," noted a delighted Stefan Schmitz.

TRANSFERRING OLD DATA AND IMPLEMENTING THE SOLUTION

It took just under a year to go from project design to going live. At the end of 2019, Stefan Schmitz and his team began to design the interfaces for the existing ERP and CRM system. The interface for transferring data off the old system was designed by three employees who knew the previous archive solution well. "From Kendox, we got specialist support to show us how best to export documents including their index data," said Schmitz. In Spring 2020, the old data was then transferred over – or imported to Kendox InfoShare, in other words – which took some time, given the large volume of data involved.

As well as providing in-depth consulting services for the data migration and for sizing the new environment, Kendox also helped to configure and set up the new DMS/ECM platform. Sport-Thieme also provided an on-premises test environment, where any changes to the environment could be thoroughly tested before going live. Among other things, the test environment was used to prepare the exported old data for seamless transposition into the cloud system. "We wanted to use the test environment to initially check how best to prepare these large existing data volumes, then to figure out how to transfer them all at once from our data centre to the cloud, as efficiently as possible."

In the second half of 2020, the scanning stations were set up and configured and a final plugin for archiving tax documents was configured. Finally, Sport-Thieme was able to completely shut down its old archive in November 2020. Since then, users at Sport-Thieme have worked with the new cloud-based DMS/ECM system – and most of them barely noticed the switchover.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

A number of other future processes are now also in the planning phase, based on the Kendox InfoShare cloud archive. The Kendox DMS will be used both for legally compliant document storage and to control workflows, for example to approve documents for release, or to exchange documents digitally with manufacturers and sub-suppliers via a web portal.

ABOUT KENDOX

Kendox are the experts in digital document management and process automation for offices and administrative bureaus. With years of experience providing solutions using its own in-house technology, Kendox works in particular with customers in industry and manufacturing, trade and e-commerce, services, and logistics as well as with public institutions, schools and universities.

Kendox's applications are supplied and operated in the cloud from the company's own virtual data centres in Germany and Switzerland. Its software solutions are based on forward-looking technologies and meet today's security and data protection requirements.

Kendox's document and process automation solutions integrate with Microsoft 365, leading ERP solutions and many other specialist applications. Thanks to Kendox's collaboration with other solution providers and integration partners, the Kendox software platform works in any number of diverse use cases.

Kendox AG is based in Oberriet, Switzerland. It has branches and sales and consulting offices in Oberhausen (Germany), Puchheim (Germany), Vienna (Austria), and Serbia, as well as other locations in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. Together with its partner network, Kendox provides ongoing support to over one thousand customers.

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