

Mergers, acquisitions, content

Implementing a content-management system at SSA Global

In August 2003, SSA Global acquired Baan. Since SSA Global did not have a content-management system, it was important to implement one. Paul ten Donkelaar explains how the e-communication team managed to change its internet and intranet to the new SSA Global branding, upload new content and train new owners around the world.



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Having combined its functional and technical marketing and IT staff to form a single e-communication team, Baan, the Netherlands-based provider of enterprise-resource-planning (ERP) solutions, reached some major milestones within a year. Apart from a fully re-designed corporate internet with 23 country sites compared to an original two, and an intranet that has grown from holding 500 documents to 4,900, and which now has 216 content managers compared to an original 10, we realised a cost saving of over US\$1m.

The evolution of content management at Baan

The history of content management at Baan has provided a steep learning curve and impacted on our future strategic direction. In 1998, our marketing and IT departments purchased and implemented our first content-management system. Although the system was relatively enhanced, with some definite personalisation possibilities, lack of co-operation between departments led to content duplication and an explosion of standalone sites. The complexity of the system also meant it took a long time to develop components and templates. So, in 1999, marketing bought a second system and asked IT to implement it. Unfortunately, almost the entire IT team left halfway through implementation leaving hardly any functional and technical documentation.

Challenging times began in the year 2000 when our chief executive officer left. We were re-organising and Invensys acquired us in August

2000. Money became an issue and as the second content-management system was too expensive, a third was selected, which is the system we use today. During implementation the lack of communication and co-operation between marketing, IT and some other units caused inefficiency. Nevertheless, at the end of 2001, www.baan.com was successfully launched. When my predecessor left in January 2002, I was given responsibility for continuing the challenge, and since I was previously involved, I knew we first needed to get organised and centralised.

A situation description: March 2002

Four departments – marketing, research and development, support and IT – each with different reporting lines situated in the Netherlands, UK and US were dealing with over 200 websites. Our corporate website, which had two country sites, and our intranet were the only sites using a content-management system, but the satisfaction levels of various staff involved was below zero. Since external consultants built almost the entire system, our own technical knowledge remained somewhat limited. Performance and stability were not looking good either, largely because the administration layer was an integral part of the layout, but we also ended up with over 76 user groups and 600 templates for our corporate site. This made the system highly unstable and user-unfriendly, which meant only about ten people could work on it.

The intranet focused on marketing-related materials, held only about 500 documents, and lacked interactive features such as forums. Besides this, almost every department had its own e-newsletter linking to different servers and intranets, so the means of communication were much dispersed. Various country organisations had their own web agency, which led to an array of different websites with hardly any consistency, not to mention extra costs. Finally, a clear return on

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investment that indicated real significant value to our organisation was never made.

Getting organised: The foundation of the e-communication team

Organisation, centralisation, communication and co-operation are crucial to an effective web strategy. Through meetings with members of the four departments, we began to consider how to tackle those issues we had previously faced. To ensure an effective, competitive, customer-focused web strategy, a centralised web team combining process and creative and technical knowledge in one unit was required. It would include all project management, application management, design, editing and systems resources needed. The proposal was discussed with senior management and a member of the leadership team since high-level sponsorship was essential to success.

At the beginning of April 2002, the proposal was approved and the decision made to create one centralised internet team within Baan – the e-communication team; e-communication for the benefit of multiple audiences inside and outside of Baan. Besides reducing costs by using internal resources more efficiently and expensive external resources less, our goal was to improve internal efficiency through community-based communication, collaboration and information management. A third goal was more effective communication with our target groups through our websites.

It is fundamental to understand that the e-communication team is an enabling team and a service that other Baan departments and employees can take advantage of. But it does not have responsibility for content. Content can be anything delivered to an audience via the internet or intranet, for example, a PowerPoint, a customer success story, text on www.baan.com, a press release or a functional diagram. Responsibility for what that content says belongs to the communication co-ordinator and nominated members of his or her team. The e-communication team is responsible for the infrastructure, technology, branding, look, feel and delivery of content via the internet or intranet. But what we say must be the responsibility of the domain expert, a solutions manager, a vice president, the board, a department or our public-relations agencies. Identifying and driving ownership of content, and educating the company about the process, will be a

fundamental contributor to the success of the team.

With a small team of four people that began with a manager, designer, web developer and system administrator, and which expanded to

include a project manager and two web developers just a couple of months later – we began our rollercoaster adventure.

The rollercoaster adventure

Our first focus was on creating a strong foundation by improving performance, creating a stable infrastructure, re-building the application technically, and re-designing both our internet and intranet.

In addition to headcount freezes, another re-organisation, and management changes, the IT organisation (counting technical colleagues) of all Invensys companies, including Baan, was outsourced to IBM. Fortunately, we could continue as a single team, but with increased bureaucracy. As well as Invensys' decision to outsource its IT function, it elected to roll out a worldwide strategy to unify its organisation, which encompassed several web plans within Invensys companies (100 dotcom websites with over 55,000 pages). I became closely involved in the Invensys Web Steering Committee, where I participated in a content-management system pilot project in the US and design meetings.

This led to a delay in our rollout plans since we were not sure if we would continue with our content-management system. But still our technical team continued with the re-build of the site. As the content management



FIGURE 2: BAAN WEBSITE 2003

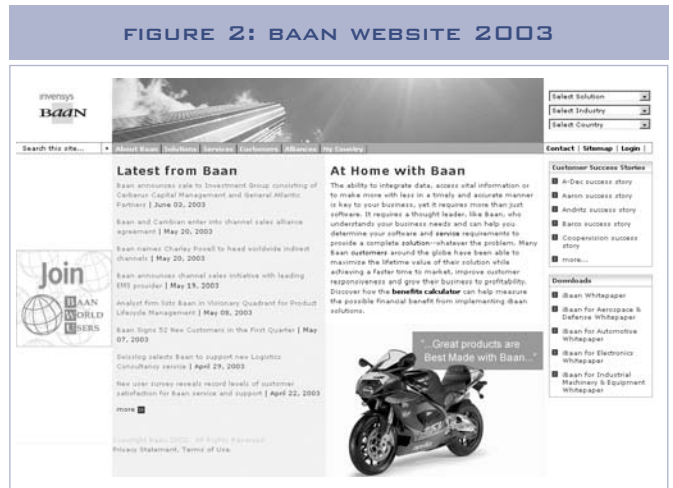


FIGURE 3: SSA GLOBAL WEBSITE 2004



system pilot took longer and longer, we decided to roll out our site based on the design proposal submitted to Invensys.

One year on... March 2003
The highlight of our rollercoaster

adventure was when we launched our re-branded www.baan.com site and drew up our balances. We had saved over US\$1m, mainly by centralising the team, obtaining a site licence, and carrying out the work ourselves instead of outsourcing to a technical and graphical consultancy.

With the new www.baan.com site, visitors should be able to find information more quickly and work with easier navigation and a more attractive, fresh layout. But it wasn't just the look and feel of the site that was new. 'Under the bonnet' are powerful new features giving users much greater control over the site. Each of the 23 local countries, from Brazil to China, has dedicated people managing their own content on a daily basis. The new system allows real-time editing and publishing of pages, as well as offering added functionality and even building new sites using modules that resemble Lego blocks. What's more, the separation of content (text, pictures, multimedia) from layout and site structure allows re-purposing of content and rapid global changes to, for example, branding. Technically, we reduced the number of templates from 600 to 20, and cut the number of user groups from 76 to 10. In addition, we created 15 campaign websites for various countries in the content-management system.

Regarding the intranet, we completely restructured it and applied the same coding and features that we use for our corporate site. We also brought the entire organisation onto the intranet, including interactive forums (+/- 3,500 documents), whereas last year, the intranet only represented marketing (+/- 500 documents). We trained 140 people to manage their content daily using an improved performance, user-friendly content-management system with different workflows and access rights. This was quite an increase compared

to 2002 when we had only 10 people using a poor performance, user-unfriendly system. In the months following March 2003, we applied a similar layout to the intranet and trained another 70 people. Also, we migrated various single standalone sites and reduced the number of sites from approximately 222 to about 150.

With the merger of Baan with SSA Global, a provider of extended ERP solutions for manufacturing, services and public organisations worldwide, the e-communication team was amalgamated with the web-solutions team. With ten people, we are now applying similar principles to those that we did at Baan. As SSA Global was rolling out a new branding strategy, a site was already created in asp, which went live in October 2003. At that time, all sites of acquired companies were closed, including www.baan.com. In the background, we are now transforming www.baan.com into www.ssaglobal.com using the same content-management system. We had already transformed the Baan intranet into the SSA Global intranet in early December 2003.

Soon we will be launching phase two of the corporate website project, which includes a content-management system that allows regions to self manage the country sites. Currently, regional representatives are loading content to build a network of about 15 different country sites. These sites will provide localised content for our regions, while providing us with additional opportunities to leverage regional campaigns.

Towards an internet culture at SSA Global

Content management will not solve your website problems, but a clear strategy will. With a strong foundation, we have created a way for SSA Global to easily merge the sites of future companies that it wants to acquire.

We will continue to ensure our websites are an excellent reflection of how we work as a company. This point cannot be stressed enough. The SSA Global intranet reflects how well we're organised to our internal staff, while our extranets reflect the same to our alliance relationships, and so on. ☺

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