



Specialist materials wholesaler **Signwriters Supplies** provides commercial materials to the sign and display industry throughout New Zealand. Established in 1982, they specialise in sourcing and supplying everything from adhesive graphic vinyls and boards to paints, brushes and accessories to commercial sign writers across the country.



## SAP HELPS SIGNWRITERS SUPPLIES CONTROL INVENTORY AND MAINTAIN GROWTH

Supplying 3,500 product lines to more than 1,300 customers is a big task. Split that task between three offices in different parts of the country and things become even more challenging.

Specialist materials wholesaler Signwriters Supplies, which provides commercial materials to the sign and display industry throughout New Zealand, has grown to become one of the largest companies of its type in the country.

Established in 1982, Signwriters Supplies specialises in sourcing and supplying everything from adhesive graphic vinyls and boards to paints, brushes and accessories to commercial sign writers across the country. With a 17-strong staff, the company has branches in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch.

General Manager Charles Schnauer said his company had enjoyed a dramatic growth spurt during the past three years and had found its existing IT systems could no longer effectively support activities.

Day-to-day operations were reliant on an ageing DOS-based software package which, while it had performed well, could not cope with the extra workload new clients and growing inventory levels were causing.

"It had got to the stage where, with multiple stock locations, we



were pushing the software way beyond what it had ever been designed to do," said Mr Schnauer. "It wasn't too far away from giving up the ghost completely."

In mid 2002, the company began the search for a new software platform capable of supporting existing operations as well as providing a solid foundation for future growth. A range of options were considered, before the opportunity emerged to become one of the first sites to implement SAP's Business One software suite.

**"A powerful result for the company has been the ability to expand the core functionality of SAP Business One by utilising the standard tools to capture specific data together with the ability to write customised reports using the query wizard"**

Charles Schnauer, General Manager  
Signwriters Supplies

"Before our partner REALTECH came to us with this option, we had not considered SAP because we believed their products were beyond anything we could need and really the domain of much larger organisations," said Mr Schnauer.

However, after a comprehensive review of capabilities, Signwriters Supplies decided in January 2004 to implement SAP Business One and set a "go live" date of March 1.

To make the project even more challenging, the company also decided to upgrade its core hardware platform, moving to an HP server running Windows 2000 Terminal Services. The server provides access to the SAP application for staff in each of the three offices.

"It was a challenging project but we managed to get everything up and running by March 1," said Mr Schnauer. "We did much

of the implementation ourselves to keep costs down, and were supported throughout by REALTECH."

Mr Schnauer said one of the key advantages of SAP Business One was that the software could be used almost entirely "out of the box".

"There were a couple of areas where we looked at the way we operated internally and changed things slightly to suit the SAP software. This was a better option than customising the software to suit our processes, although we do have the option of doing that."

He said any small problems that had been encountered during implementation and the first months of operation were quickly ironed out by REALTECH or SAP.

"Now we're up and running, we still have the support backing of a very large company which gives you a real sense of security," he said.

Training staff in the use of the new application was "straightforward", with the SAP Business One screens proving quite intuitive for users.

"It didn't take long for all staff to feel comfortable with the new applications," he said. "Having a Windows look-and-feel to the whole thing also helps a lot."

From a management perspective, SAP's Business One has allowed Mr Schnauer to have a clear view of day-to-day activities right across the company.

"It all comes down to transparency," he said. "With our previous systems I could not see things like profitability by branch, the previous application made me feel that it was like picking figures out of a hat."

Now SAP Business One provides a set of accounts segmented by

branch or for the company as a whole. Stock control also has improved, with inventory lists available in real time to staff in all three locations.

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Charles Schnauer, General Manager  
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"We can quickly see whether we have a particular item in stock and where it is being stored. This has helped to further improve our customer service levels."

REALTECH's Vice President Asia Pacific Tim Woolfield said, "SAP Business One has given Signwriters Supplies enhanced visibility of the organisation from both a financial and inventory perspective allowing business decisions to be made on a factual basis.

"A powerful result for the company has been able the ability to expand the core functionality of SAP Business One by utilising the standard tools to capture specific data together with the ability to write customised reports using the query wizard has been very powerful."

Future company plans include equipping on-the-road sales staff with mobile technology to enable them to remotely access the SAP application to lodge orders and check stock levels.

Mr Schnauer said the company might also consider using SAP's fixed asset module when it is released, together with existing features such as production and service modules that are yet to be used.



#### AT A GLANCE

<b>SAP Solution</b>	SAP Business One
<b>Key Business Driver</b>	Needed to upgrade old MS DOS based system to support expansion
<b>Industry</b>	Wholesaler (importer and distributor of signwriting supplies)
<b>Project Length</b>	4 weeks
<b>Implementation Partner</b>	REALTECH
<b>Number of Employees</b>	17 employees in 3 locations

"I'm confident we now have a software platform in place that has the capability to grow with us and support our activities well into the future," he said.