

customer case study

Aon Consulting is a leading employee benefits and risk management firm – a division of Aon Corp., the Chicago-based provider of risk management services, insurance and reinsurance, and human capital consulting. From a center of excellence in Brussels, Belgium, Aon Consulting consolidates pensions and benefits accounting data for clients across the EMEA (Europe, Middle East and Africa) region, enabling the client companies to accurately report benefits information in their annual accounts.

Since its inception, the accounting consolidation team had used Aon Consulting's proprietary system, Global Benefits Manager. The system had been upgraded multiple times during its six years of use, and its ability grow further to meet business requirements was limited.

As a result, processing some of the more complex consolidations required the use of Excel spreadsheets, increasing the amount of manual effort. The need for manual intervention limited the number of consolidations the actuaries could do and therefore the number of clients the group could serve.

Aon Consulting was also keen to maintain its reputation for leading-edge technology capabilities, and recognised the need for a new system that would meet these demands. The company needed to be able to deliver to clients quick, flexible interim reporting, done monthly or quarterly as opposed to the more traditional annual accounts; for this, a new accounting consolidation system became critical.

Stuart Toll, Aon Consulting's chief architect, led research on whether to build a new solution or acquire third-party software. Once the team studied Host Analytics Budget, the choice was easy, according to Alan Collingham, a business analyst in the IT team. "The actuaries needed a solution quickly," he says. "The Host Analytics solution was web-based and ready to use out of the box, so the decision was taken quickly to go with that."

Requirements satisfied

The fact that Host Analytics delivers the application as Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) added to the simplicity of deployment. "You just issue some user IDs and start working," says Alan Collingham. Rapid implementation was important because Aon Consulting was about to launch a sales campaign across the EMEA region, and "having state-of-the-art consolidation functionality is a key element of our proposition," Collingham adds.

The team in Aon Consulting's actuarial center of excellence in Brussels had built a collection of complex spreadsheets that accurately performed the calculations for interim reporting. Another selection criterion was, therefore, a product that would allow Aon to preserve that



“Host Analytics will enable us to offer superior functionality to our current customers and to potential new ones.”

—Alan Collingham, Business Analyst, Aon Consulting



knowledge in a structured, centralized application. Here again, Host Analytics met the requirement. “The Excel-like interface allows our actuaries to leverage the time and effort we have invested in spreadsheets,” Alan Collingham says. “It also saved them from having to learn a new scripting language for calculations and a new user interface.”

Security and data integrity were other issues that new software would have to address. “Excel isn’t safe because end users can make changes in the templates,” explains Laurent Kleinblatt, a senior actuary with the Brussels team. “Host Analytics provides a way of sharing information without the risk of any one breaking the calculations.”

Eventually there will be some 200 users of Host Analytics Budget, including actuaries in many Aon Consulting locations and benefits managers in the client companies. The team in the center of excellence act as “superusers” of Host Analytics and stewards of the benefits and pensions data. “The system’s built-in user management lets us ‘lock down’ parts so people see only the figures they need to see,” says Raf Loyens, an actuarial specialist in Brussels.

A further challenge was the lack of visibility in consolidations done in Excel. Because the calculations had to be done offline, Aon’s clients could not see, for example, what happened when they asked the actuaries for changes, only the results. The time taken to make the changes was also longer than it could have been. “With an online tool the client feels that he has more control over the process,” says Raf Loyens. “Our clients want to be able to do things themselves, or at least see what we are doing.” Host Analytics allows this transparency and interactivity, and its forecasting capability enables actuaries and end users to perform ‘what-if’ scenarios that explore options for managing benefits and pensions more profitably.

Full deployment

Due to client demand and the imminent sales campaign, Aon Consulting needed to demonstrate the new system as soon as possible. Even while completing its in-house deployment, the technical team developed demos in Host Analytics to show current and potential clients that it now has the advanced functionality and transparency they require. “We have already received very positive feedback from clients,” Raf Loyens reports. Two major clients are participating in the initial migration to Host Analytics, and Aon management expects to have nearly all clients using it for consolidation and reporting before the end of this year.

The new software’s Excel-like user interface will help smooth the transition. Actuaries in the center of excellence have designed Host Analytics templates in which inputting data closely resembles the way it looked in Excel.

To measure the return on investment in the Host Analytics software, Aon Consulting’s management has set aggressive targets for increasing the total number of clients served by the system and for processing more client data without needing to grow the accounting consolidation team. For the longer term, the company is confident it has a system that will be more than able to handle new requirements as the business evolves. “Host Analytics has so much flexibility that we think the software is future-proof,” says Raf Loyens. And having the vendor responsible for making improvements and adding functionality, Alan Collingham adds, “is one less worry for us.”



challenges

- Existing software could not be enhanced to meet new requirements for increasingly complex benefits and pensions data consolidation
- The old system would require major modifications to satisfy clients’ demands for monthly and quarterly reports

solution

- Host Analytics Budget provides automated, online consolidation in a secure environment
- The hosted Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) was available for rapid deployment and has robust reporting capabilities
- Clients have responded positively to demonstrations of the new system, which support a broad-scale sales campaign

results

- Actuaries who manage the benefits and pensions programs spend less time on consolidations and more on enhancing the services they provide
- Clients have full visibility of data and can perform ‘what-if’ planning, but customizable user permissions limit them to role-appropriate access
- Aon Consulting will be able to serve larger volumes of clients, and handle increasingly complex consolidations, without increasing actuarial headcount

Host Analytics Headquarters:
Host Analytics, Inc.
900 Island Drive, Suite 203
Redwood City, CA 94065 USA

Phone: 650 249 7100
Fax: 866 896 1738
Toll Free: 866 391 HOST (4678)
Email: info@hostanalytics.com

www.hostanalytics.com