

S. Rothchild Leverages SaaS

June 01, 2007

New York-based apparel manufacturer S. Rothchild is implementing a product lifecycle management solution that is delivered via the software-as-a-service (SaaS) model.

In its search for a better way to manage product information, S. Rothchild & Co., the venerable outerwear manufacturer, has become a technology pioneer by choosing a solution delivered via the software-as-a-service (SaaS) model over other standard industry desktop applications.

With an SaaS solution, the software application, the data it houses and its processing power reside on a server rather than on desktop computers. A standard Internet browser interface provides users with access to the software's services and information by way of a network or Web server. Some describe the SaaS model as an "on-demand" delivery method for technology vs. the "on-premise" delivery method of traditional software packages.

In January, S. Rothchild signed on with SaaS technology provider Fashionware Solutions and began the work of integrating the vendor's Fashionshare product lifecycle management (PLM) application with the AS/400 mainframe system at S. Rothchild's New York headquarters. The system was scheduled to go live last month.

S. Rothchild invested in Fashionshare to find better ways to collaborate around product information — a necessary capability of an apparel manufacturer in an industry where cycle times have become quicker and quicker.

"Although we design our own lines, we're also designing on an individual basis for private label accounts and designing into specific needs for certain customers," said Scott Richter, vice president of product development and sourcing. "So we're hoping that with Fashionshare, we'll be able to streamline the process, use the time that our designers and the technicians have in a more useful manner and follow the process from beginning to end in a more concise manner."

SaaS to stay agile at 126 years old

A family-owned business founded in 1881, S. Rothchild is one of the United States' longest-running apparel enterprises. The company makes men's, women's and children's outerwear under several licenses, including licenses for the brands Larry Levine, Via Spiga, DKNY and Elie Tahari, and also produces goods under its own brands, including S. Rothchild, and private labels. It owns a factory in Central America, but also sources apparel from Eastern Europe and the Far East.

Richter said one obvious advantage of an SaaS solution is that his team will be able to log on to the system globally to access all types of product information.

"With proper codes, I'm going to be able to access all the files anywhere in the world," he said. "So when I'm traveling, I'm no longer traveling with paper. In other words, we run thousands of styles, and when I go to China, I can't have a suitcase filled with technical sheets. With Fashionshare, I can go into the hotel or go into any of the offices and sit down and sign onto the computer and get what I need." Not having to install software on desktops also helps reduce IT administration and hardware costs, and eases overall implementation, he noted. Moreover, the web-based solution makes it easier for S. Rothchild to collaborate with factories because global vendors can more easily access company data via the web, he added.

For example, factories that have been given access to Fashionshare can view and share product package changes, such as tweaks to a style or new costing information, in an online environment.

"It makes following through that much easier," said Richter. "It's not an e-mail with 10 styles for design; it's an e-mail relating to that specific style back and forth."

Centralized data, pay-as-you-go pricing

The SaaS solution also provides one source to find the most current update on a specific product pack, as well as any revisions made during the production cycle. This helps to eliminate the problems that often occur with desktop software solutions when multiple versions of style information may exist on different computers or be captured only in e-mail histories among the company's staff and that of its production partners.

"Everything in a package can be followed through from beginning to end," notes Richter. "Sample requests, sample comments, pre-production comments, changes made to garments — you start on a concept and take it from the concept level to the final product all within a package. You can start with a reference number and bring it into a style number."

To use the Fashionshare solution, S. Rothchild pays a monthly subscription fee, and thus has avoided the typically high capital investment

required for a full-scale desktop software installation. Fashionware Solutions' monthly price per user ranges from \$350 for one to 10 users down to \$225 for 41 to 50 users. Apparel firms can provide free access to Fashionshare for factory partners because of the solution's centralized, web-based hosting model and the fact that factories usually only need to access a limited amount of information from the system. The monthly subscription fee includes access to the software anywhere over the Internet. It also includes user setup and configuration, maintenance, upgrades, training, end-user support and hosting. Fashionware charges additional fees on a case-by-case basis for companies that want to integrate its solution with their other software applications.

"It's a sliding scale depending on the number of users that you have, and the costs amortize," said Richter. "The longer you run the systems, the cheaper it becomes. I'm not going back, and they're saying, 'There's something new that we're doing,' and suddenly they're selling me this new product. All the updates are free. So we felt that cost-wise, they were very competitive."

Richter said it certainly helped S. Rothschild's comfort level with Fashionware to have a longstanding relationship with Fashionware's founder, Paul Friedman, who is a son of the chairman of S. Rothschild. Friedman retired from being executive vice president of the firm's global outerwear business, and in 2004, launched Fashionware.

Winning users by making it easy

Richter stressed that the reason the company choose to invest in Fashionware was that his team grew comfortable with the system.⁴ "Based on what [Paul Friedman] showed the design team and technical people, they felt comfortable working with it, so it was a joint type of decision," said Richter. "At the end of the day, either the system works or it doesn't."

While simple access to data and the promise of smooth implementation were critical in S. Rothschild's decision to go with Fashionware, Richter said the company ultimately was won over to Fashionshare because the system is easy to use.

For instance, Fashionshare incorporates a number of drop-down screens and menus that make it easy to explore libraries of fabrics, buttons and trim, he noted. "You spend a lot of time working on the computer, and if the design and technical people can find something easy to use, they tend to use it and use it more efficiently," Richter added. "They wind up using their time more [effectively] and accomplishing more within a timeframe. There are a lot of systems out there that are very complicated."

Richter also said Fashionshare is "very visual" with loads of pictures, which are particularly useful in situations where there are language differences when working with global factories.

In the short term, the system should enable S. Rothschild to cut down on errors, such as shipping delays or costing issues, said Richter. Longer term, there are opportunities to save labor costs. "If people are doing their jobs more efficiently and effectively, I'll need fewer people," he said.

"The most important thing about having a system is making sure all the people that are going to use it are comfortable with it, that it's a logical system to be able to work with, and you have the ability to input all your information and your suppliers' information to build a product pack," he concluded. "Thus far, everything that we're working with on Fashionware is showing me that we're going to be able to put together a detailed technical product pack that our factories are going to be able to use to deliver to us the correct end product."

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