

LabSystems Case Study: LabSystems Training and Rhône-Poulenc Agriculture Ltd

Company:

Rhône-Poulenc Agriculture Ltd

Industry Sector:

Agrochemicals

Environment:

R&D

Software Used:

SampleManager v4.0

Platform:

Windows NT

Database:

Oracle



Rhône-Poulenc Agriculture Ltd (RPAL) is part of the Rhône-Poulenc Group, one of the world's leading life sciences companies. Rhône-Poulenc Agriculture Ltd produces a wide range of crop protection products, carefully developed to meet the exacting needs of the farmer. Herbicides, fungicides and insecticides are the core products of the organization.

RPAL's mission is "To be a major world leader in crop protection by being the supplier of the most innovative solutions:

- bringing value to farmers
- increasing the quality and quantity of crop commodities
- respecting people and the environment whilst conducting our business within the highest quality management principles and values".

With approximately 6,500 employees worldwide, RPAL recorded consolidated sales of nearly FRF 87 billion in 1998. The company has three main international sites: its headquarters in Lyon, France, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina in the US and Ongar, Essex in the UK.

R&D Organizational Structure

Rhône-Poulenc Agriculture Ltd divides its sites into operational centres. Ongar in Essex is concerned with herbicide discovery, whilst Lyon specializes in fungicides and North Carolina concentrates on insecticide research.

Rhône-Poulenc Ongar's research activities are based on rapidly changing technologies in chemistry, plant molecular sciences and environmental modelling and diagnostics. Several laboratories, including the chemical research laboratories and the analytical chemistry laboratories are involved in research and development, and are supported by the Biodiscovery laboratories and greenhouses. Approximately 250 staff are employed on the site, of which 150 work within R&D.

The corporate organizational structure enables the RPAL staff to be supported internally by an IS department. Each site is autonomous in its IS support infrastructure, although there is close interface with RPAL on a corporate level, and IT decisions relating to architecture and policies are taken at Group level.

The Support Structure

The IS support structure for RPAL is split between an internal department and a help desk which is outsourced to IBM. The internal IS Delivery Team, consisting of 8 staff and split between the Ongar site and the main manufacturing site at Norwich is multi-skilled, covering the company's four main functions:

- R&D
- Manufacturing
- Sales and Marketing
- HQ Function

Training Needs

There is a formal training program in place within Rhône-Poulenc Agriculture Ltd and the company is a certified Investor in People (IIP). The organization's commitment to the personal development of staff is managed on both a corporate and a departmental level. As well as allocating annual departmental budgets for training, each member of staff has an individual assessment and training schedule. During each assessment, the IS personnel identify possible courses for further training.

Training Program

The IS Delivery Team's training program has progressed in line with RPAL's installation of SampleManager. The first course attended by personnel from RPAL was the Introduction to SampleManager.

Jack Gibson, IS Specialist, was sent on this course on the recommendation of his management. The course was Jack's first with LabSystems following his move into IS from R&D five years ago.

"The Introduction to SampleManager course was the obvious first step for anyone being exposed to the system," explains Jack. "It is applicable for all users who are approaching the system for the first time. Although I had been on a number of VAX and Ingres courses at the time, one added bonus of attending the



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SampleManager Introduction was that I learned more about the operating system and database than ever before. This was because the knowledge was so applicable to what I was learning about the LIMS."

Since the first course, Jack has attended three further LabSystems' courses:

- Stability Enhanced Functionality Module
- Advanced Programming in VGL
- Oracle for SampleManager

Jack took the responsibility for requesting these further courses, having identified his own training needs in these areas to support SampleManager internally. The decision was easy to make: "Training speeds up our knowledge of the application. Each course offers a complementary growth in knowledge."

System Migration

Rhône-Poulenc Agriculture Ltd took the corporate decision some time ago to phase out their VAX hardware and move onto Windows NT® servers. As part of the move onto Windows NT, the R&D SampleManager LIMS had to be upgraded onto v4.0 for Windows NT®.

To coincide with the system migration onto a new platform, RPAL immediately invested in the more recent LabSystems training that specialized in Windows NT. Jack proceeded to attend the Managing SampleManager on Windows NT course, whilst his user colleague, Ian Cooper also attended two courses - Configuring SampleManager (NT) and Managing SampleManager (NT). By both attending the same course in managing SampleManager v4.0 on Windows NT, the pair were intending to gain knowledge both from a technical support angle and from the user perspective.

Following the courses, Jack and Ian will provide in-house group training of users from the Environmental Sciences department.

"By moving onto a new platform, we identified that RPAL required knowledge of both NT and of SampleManager on the new platform. Our previous experience shows that the Training Services would be well-placed to provide us with this knowledge. In addition, each new course allows us to move away from our own functionality and view the system afresh. By exposing delegates to other LIMS users from different industries with other applications, all attendees of the training courses can pick up other users' experience at the same time." continues Jack.

Partnership

Having commissioned training hand-in-hand with system upgrades for more than five years, RPAL now relies closely upon LabSystems' own judgement of Rhône-Poulenc Agriculture's needs. "It is getting more and more difficult to identify our own training needs in SampleManager, as our experience of the system becomes more refined," Jack explains. "In the case of our Windows NT migration, we spoke to the Training Services personnel first because we believed that a bespoke course would best suit our needs. However, as LabSystems' software evolves, so do the courses on offer and therefore they were able to identify a suitable course very quickly."

The Benefits

By attending courses to develop their knowledge, RPAL find that they never have gaps in their knowledge of how the LIMS can work for the business.

"In my opinion, Training Services is LabSystems' best product," says Jack. "They have always been good and we have had 100% satisfaction. As part of our internal assessments, we complete questionnaires on a three-monthly basis about the validity of any training that we have attended. These reports are always favourable about the training we buy from LabSystems."

The attendance of Jack and his colleague Ian of the Configuring and Managing a LIMS on NT training course, in preparation for the upgrade to SampleManager 4.0, has resulted in them gaining a good knowledge not only of the new LIMS but also of NT and Oracle. This will ensure that users will have full local support and training during and after the upgrade.

LabSystems Training Services offer a wide range of courses in LIMS, to suit the needs of users at every level. For more information, please contact LabSystems for more information. E-mail: training@labsystems.com

For information about Rhône-Poulenc Agriculture Ltd please see the website <http://www.rpal.co.uk>

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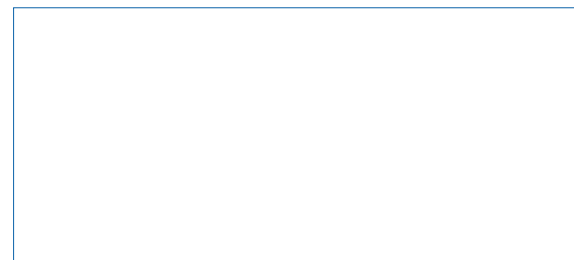
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