



UC4 Just In Time Automation Beds Down At Silentnight

Silentnight is synonymous with providing a relaxing and comfortable night's sleep to millions of consumers. Firmly established as the UK bed industry's largest manufacturer and brand leader, Silentnight is committed to offering consumer choice, quality, comfort and support, whilst constantly innovating with an aim of producing the ultimate bed selection. In addition to building and distributing a range of major brands including Silentnight, Rest assured, Pocket Spring Bed Company and Layezee, the UK organization is the only manufacturer outside the United States licensed to make Sealy beds.

Operating across three locations in Barnoldswick, Batley and Aspatia, the company had relied upon a DEC Alpha based IT application IMPCON to support its manufacturing processes. When Silentnight became the last UK company to be using this solution, concerns about lack of integration were compounded by notice that the vendor's last support engineer was about to retire. Ticking all key boxes with manufacturing, distribution, planning and financials components Silentnight decided to implement JD Edwards Enterprise 1 as its corporate ERP standard.

While each plant is dedicated to producing individual brands of bed, Silentnight Group wanted extra flexibility in terms of being able to route resources to match production demands. Consolidating business operations into a single JD Edwards instance would allow the bed maker to achieve this goal. Centralizing system workload would also lead to Silentnight's JDE Enterprise 1 application needing to support a significant amount of transaction processing.

silentnight group

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Julian Lempriere,
JDE Project Manager at Silentnight

Silentnight Group Limited

Business: Bed manufacturing industry

Corporate Headquarters: Barnoldswick,
Lancashire, UK

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CASE STUDY

At A Glance

Business Challenge

- Consolidate business operations to centralized ERP whilst maintaining 3 sites
- Reduce batch window and response times
- Automate JDE Enterprise 1 background processes
- Optimize elapsed time for IT workload to meet business demands

UC4 Solution

- Easy to use colorful process visualization
- Validated JDE Enterprise 1 interfaces
- Object oriented modular architecture
- Output scanning
- Automatic restart/recovery handling

Silentnight Benefits

- Savings of 2½–3 hours processing time every night
- End-to-end business process visibility
- Increased productivity for IT and administrative staff
- Greater accuracy in management reporting and integrity checking
- Enhanced performance against business SLAs

Business Challenge

With a customer commitment to build and deliver beds within aggressive lead times, Silentnight ensures its IT resources and systems are optimized to meet business demands. This has meant an extensive multi-million pound investment in automated system solutions. JDE generates massive quantities of transaction data – much of which requires batch processing. The internal JDE Enterprise 1 scheduler relies upon built-in time lags to prevent dependent jobs starting too soon, introducing avoidable latency into critical business operations. Failure to correctly estimate finish times could also result in jobs processing incorrect data.

“Going forward we knew the combination of multiple sites; one instance and a very small overnight processing window would inevitably lead to challenges. Jobs were taking much longer to run. Jobs that needed to run within a 24 hour cycle would take 29 hours,” said Julian Lempriere, JDE Project Manager at Silentnight. “We were having performance issues with balancing real time and batch processing demands. End users were feeling the impact with poor response times.”

UC4 Solution

Silentnight selected UC4 because it offered unique rapid application automation of JDE Enterprise 1 batch processes through validate interfaces. Dynamic scheduling meant that elapsed time for overnight high volume workload could be compressed to fit into a shrinking batch window. It would also allow daytime background processing to be optimized, maximizing throughput at minimal impact.

“A scheduler was on my wish list. Our IS department is very lean, there was no option of developing internally neither did we wish to re invent the wheel. Instead, we seek out the best of breed solutions to help IS provision the optimal solution for the business,” said Lempriere. “I knew what I wanted. I wanted end-to-end visibility into our business operations and I knew we would not get this from a homegrown tool. UC4 talked the right language. I saw business value in rapid application automation of the JDE scheduler and our other key applications such as Cognos.”

Selling the idea of needing to acquire additional tools to non-technical staff at Silentnight was not easy. Having invested in an expensive ERP they can be surprised to learn they need to spend more to get a system that performs efficiently. The ROI tool provided by UC4 helped improve Silentnight senior management understanding of the benefits a workload automation solution could bring to their JDE environment.

“The 8 hour overnight batch window didn't provide enough time to run the jobs needed to run. At the end of each day we needed to run MRP, sales updates, cost roll-ups, Cognos extracts, integrity reports and so on. Occasionally there would also be the need to apply system changes. Prior to implementing UC4 we had incidents where the batch load would overrun. This would impact response times and end-user performance. This was an immediate first win with UC4. This was nice because you could see benefit of the software from the first day,” said Lempriere.

Business users rapidly identified UC4 as a great tool for assisting in the provisioning of real time updates around the factory. Automated alerts ensure Help Desk staff no longer needs to manually check reports. UC4 object orientation allows Silentnight to manage and monitor IT workload as logical groups that reflect its business process flows. With an IT insight, business users can easily plan and make changes, while IT staff becomes more flexible in responding to business demands.

The UC4 platform is the automation layer in the IT architecture that Silentnight has established to support its business. “We've been making a cake,” said Lempriere. “We got underway with establishing a nice foundation. We're now putting new controls in. This is aimed at two things – reducing TCO with tools that make our systems run smarter and enabling greater flexibility in terms of making manufacturing and distribution processes match business demands. UC4 is one of the ingredients that is helping make sure our cake is low fat.”

Right Information to the Right People at the Right Time

Prior to implementing UC4 Silentnight integrity reporting jobs would run even though the primary sales update job failed. With UC4, dependent jobs don't run jobs if a primary job fails. This means time is not wasted and systems don't get clogged re-running jobs. Finance and admin users no longer need to manually check output files. Silentnight has automated integrity checks of reports releasing staff from trawling through pages of figures.

In addition to JDE Enterprise 1, Silentnight is also using Cognos for business intelligence management reporting and as its corporate data warehouse. Other critical applications include QAS (address management), Formscape (electronic forms) and DSI (bar code scanning) are other running on IBM UNIX, Windows & Web-based platforms. Rapid application automation has allowed Silentnight to extend its use of UC4 to integrate other systems crucial to its business operations.

“Outside our organization there is often a perception that we're an old fashioned business run by old machinery; two aspects are true – family ownership means that we have family values and secondly much of our product range is still hand built. But that is where it stops, elsewhere we use the latest manufacturing equipment sourced from across the world; ERP and Business intelligence solutions that are world leaders and the latest business management techniques. We get status updates from real-time reporting that comes out of JDE. Cognos drives various dashboards giving us instant brand analysis dissected by models and ranges,” said Lempriere. “With UC4 we have automated emailing of reports to managers, senior management and executives ensuring they get detailed insight into individual brand performance.”

Silentnight Benefits

“Having the UK’s largest Brand, Silentnight, and the World’s largest brand, Sealy, as part of its 6 brand portfolio, the 3 manufacturing sites operate round the clock and at peak times, 7 days per week. The challenge for Group IS was to maximize system up time to the business whilst finding a window large enough to process overnight routines. That’s where the UC4 solution provided the answer. In addition, the same solution manages the extraction of information to non-JDE reporting tools, allowing the business to respond to delays in the production process on a minute-by-minute basis throughout the working day,” said Lempriere. Automating Cognos workload ensures that Silentnight senior management gets to work with reports that contain the most accurate information allowing them to make smarter decisions on business operations.

“We couldn’t afford to continue running systems that had in-built slack times if we were going to support our business operations. Being able to eliminate the gaps from our JDE processing means Silentnight saves between two and a half and three hours on our overnight workload with UC4. We are also achieving efficiencies with staff spending less time doing tedious manual tasks such as checking reports. There’s also a closer alignment between business and IT users which means that we have become more effective as a team supporting today’s and tomorrow’s business challenges. The UC4 platform is firmly established as the automation platform across the Silentnight IT landscape and will be an integral IT component in our future business growth,” said Lempriere.