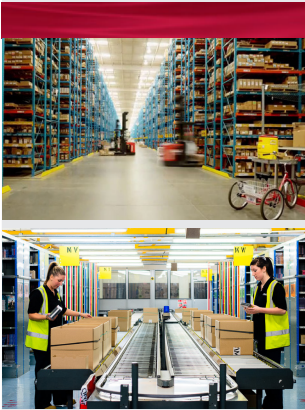**SoftLanding** SYSTEMS®

CINRAM

Cinram

Delivering on customer service with SoftLanding solutions

"AUTOMON Scheduler gives us peace of mind that what needs to happen, will happen without any slips, helping us to run an efficient operation and keep our customer service promises."

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CUSTOMER CHALLENGE

- Automate complex IBM i job scheduling tasks, to maintain high standards of operational efficiency and customer service
- Manage IT and business processes in multiple European locations from a single system
- Provide visibility of current job status and future schedules, to enable operations staff to make adjustments easily when business priorities change

SOLUTION

- IBM i automated operations – job scheduling

KEY BENEFITS

- Enables strict customer service level targets to be met by ensuring business processes happen on time, every time and to SLA
- Delivers significant increases in productivity and eliminates human error by automating scheduling of regular and ad hoc IT activities
- Provides ongoing efficiency gains through the incorporation of new time-saving features

> "We needed a reliable, efficient way of scheduling and coordinating the thousands of daily, weekly and monthly IT tasks and processes that have to be actioned by our distribution software."
>
> **Stuart Anderson**
> **IT Operations & Infrastructure Services Manager,**
> **Cinram UK**

The Challenge

Cinram Logistics is one of the largest providers of supply chain services across Europe, delivering world class solutions in warehousing, distribution and online fulfillment. A leader in running logistics operations for home entertainment media companies, Cinram works for brands such as Universal Pictures, Sky, Sony, Warner Home Video and 20th Century Fox to ensure timely delivery of film, music, computer games and consoles to the biggest retail chains in the UK and Europe. Other services include distribution of fast moving consumer goods and online order fulfillment.

Success in a competitive, deadline-driven industry hinges on meeting strict service level agreements (SLAs) for accurately turning around customer orders. For Cinram this includes next day delivery to retail stores. Failure to meet delivery targets is not an option, as it could lead to financial penalties or customers looking elsewhere when it is time to renew contracts.

To support the company's streamlined business operation an effective IT infrastructure is essential. At the heart of Cinram's IT is a bespoke Global Distribution System (GDS), which runs on the IBM i platform. This manages the entire supply chain, from collecting and processing initial orders, to ensuring the right products are shipped to the correct destinations, as well as generating invoices and tracking payments.

When the GDS was first implemented in the mid-1990s, Cinram knew that automated scheduling software would also be essential if it was to run its operations efficiently and meet customer SLAs. Stuart Anderson, IT Operations and Infrastructure Services Manager at Cinram UK, explained:

"We needed a reliable, efficient way of scheduling and coordinating the thousands of daily, weekly and monthly IT tasks and processes that have to be actioned by our distribution software. Many of these run in parallel and are interdependent – with one job triggered by or relying on data from another. The sheer number and complexity of interlinked processes make it impractical to have staff manually initiating and overseeing individual jobs round the clock."

The Solution

To manage all batch processes throughout its European operation, Cinram selected AUTOMON® Scheduler, an advanced job scheduler from UNICOM Global's SoftLanding suite of IBM i solutions. AUTOMON Scheduler makes it easy for IT operators to create, maintain and track the status of scheduled jobs, which increases productivity for Cinram while cutting operational risk.

"The IT team evaluated a variety of products, prioritizing areas such as ease of use, reliability and vendor support," said Neal Root, Cinram's IT Operations Support Manager. "AUTOMON Scheduler was the most effective tool for the task back then, and it still is today."

The software allows Cinram to control batch processes in a number of ways, including triggering jobs to run at specific intervals; according to virtual calendars; or in response to the status of other jobs or specific events.

"We use AUTOMON Scheduler to manage a huge number of essential business activities," explained Gary Makel, Technical Specialist Midrange at Cinram. "For example, we've configured a process to automatically poll for customer orders as they arrive throughout the day. This triggers another set of jobs to ensure each order is correctly processed and documented and the order details are automatically routed to our warehouse system to generate picking lists."

Other scheduled processes include sending delivery instructions to third party shipping companies, and creating invoices and statements once the warehouse management system has confirmed that an order has been loaded onto a truck. Numerous business-critical processes are scheduled overnight, including updating customer records, managing backups and running a variety of reports.

The Benefits

Stuart Anderson believes AUTOMON Scheduler plays an important role in helping Cinram deliver the high levels of service that customers expect, allowing the IT team to keep the business running efficiently:

"By supporting our Global Distribution System, AUTOMON Scheduler touches most parts of our operation, making sure important processes and events happen unattended, day and night. This software is instrumental in helping us meet our deadlines and achieve our SLAs and is essential to our success. Without it, I think we would struggle to function as a business."

Reliability is a major factor in the software's success, noted Stuart Anderson: "We have to be confident AUTOMON Scheduler will always do what it's supposed to, running important jobs as planned, without any hitches, every time. I'm pleased to say it has never let us down."

Running a supply chain is a dynamic process; Cinram's IT team is constantly reviewing and amending the job schedule to ensure the IT operation runs at peak efficiency in the wake of any changes.

"With AUTOMON Scheduler we're able make changes quickly and easily. If we need to pull forward our month-end by a few hours – if that would be more efficient, for example – then we are able to amend the schedule easily to make that happen," explained Neal Root. Ease of use is another important differentiator, according to Stuart Anderson: "Of all the tools we use on the IBM i, AUTOMON Scheduler is one of the easiest to train new people on. It's clear and intuitive to use, so new team members can quickly pick it up and start being productive without supervision."

SoftLanding consultants arrange regular feedback meetings for customers to comment on the products they are using, discuss the development roadmap and highlight any new requirements. Cinram has actively participated in these technical account meetings and acted as a pilot customer for several new features. Gary Makel explained how one new feature has helped to reduce the IT team's workload:

"We run numerous instances of GDS across different logical partitions of our IBM i computers that service various distribution centers in Europe and the UK, with AUTOMON Scheduler managing the schedule for the whole operation. Based on our feedback, a new feature has been introduced that allows us to copy schedules across different instances while maintaining any dependencies between jobs. Now, when we make a schedule change, we can replicate it across Europe in minutes, rather than having to enter changes manually on each instance. Depending on the complexity of the schedule this can save us hours or even days, and by automating the task we cut the risk of manual errors."

Looking to the immediate future, the company is keen to make use of a flowchart visualization feature developed in consultation with Cinram. AUTOMON Scheduler can generate a graphical representation of any job schedule, making it easier for IT staff to understand the flow and dependencies within complex schedules and reduce the chance of errors. "Currently we're creating flowcharts manually, so the ability to do it automatically with the new flowcharting feature will save us a lot of time," said Neal Root.

According to Stuart Anderson, AUTOMON Scheduler's contribution can be summed up as ensuring that all processes essential for the smooth running of the business always happen on time: "AUTOMON Scheduler gives us peace of mind that what needs to happen, will happen without any slips, helping us to run an efficient operation and keep our customer service promises."

About SoftLanding

SoftLanding, a division of UNICOM® Global, specializes in software solutions for the IBM i and Power Systems platform.

SoftLanding's application lifecycle management solution helps IT teams to deploy software changes faster, with less effort, and eliminates errors throughout the entire development process.

The company's enterprise content management solution releases the power of digital communications through web, mobile and email channels, without changes to existing IT systems and applications.

SoftLanding's automated operations and performance management solutions keep core business systems running at optimum levels and prevent unplanned application downtime. Menu management solutions are also available, offering easy access to corporate business applications running on IBM i.

SoftLanding solutions are available from:

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