

South-African-based ISP SEACOM Expands Globally with Acumatica Cloud ERP Foundation

OVERVIEW

Launching services in 2009, SEACOM laid Africa's first broadband submarine cable system along the continent's eastern and southern coasts. Sage proved adequate for its first few years. But as SEACOM grew into a multi-country, multi-company ISP and data provider, the company needed a more robust financial platform. SEACOM deployed Acumatica Cloud ERP, gaining the ability to scale transactions, handle multiple currencies, and quickly digest and incorporate more than 20 acquisitions.

KEY RESULTS

- Deployed an integrated, cloud-based platform successfully in 13 companies in five months
- Automated daily currency updates, eliminating manual downloads and saving hours of labor
- Gained an easy-to-use business platform with robust real-time reporting, improving insights and accelerating business decision making
- Acquired a flexible platform that handles financial processes automatically for faster SaaS provisioning and services, maintaining its competitive market advantage
- Saved accounting team 10 to 15 percent of their time every month, automating previously manual workflows
- Secured a scalable business platform paving the way for explosive growth in multiple countries

CHALLENGES

SEACOM laid Africa's first broadband submarine cable system along the continent's eastern and southern coasts, providing the African countries of Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania, Mozambique, and South Africa with high-speed Internet connectivity to Europe and Asia in 2009.

Over the past 12 years, SEACOM completed more than 20 acquisitions, expanding into several countries and becoming the number one IP fiber-optic service provider in South Africa and the largest provider in Africa. SEACOM also represents the largest Pan African Network Service Provider, using its submarine and terrestrial networks to serve wholesale enterprises and consumer markets.

SEACOM implemented Sage when it opened its doors 13 years ago, says Warren Wilbraham, chief financial officer. At the time, the company served only a limited number of customers and worked with very large transactions, so it didn't need to issue many invoices. "Our accounting was basic from a systems point of view but complex from a reporting aspect," he explains. "We had multiple jurisdictions, currencies, and entities."

Sage Limited Growth

As transaction volumes increased, SEACOM acquired more business and launched multiple services. Sage could no longer handle SEACOM's needs. The provider started experiencing billing problems as its revenue recognition and procurement process evolved, and SEACOM began offering enterprise data center services, SaaS services, and consumer services. "We started realizing we needed something different and better," Wilbraham says.

Sage couldn't support multiple currencies or handle the consolidations SEACOM needed. Therefore, SEACOM built an in-house application to handle some of the billing issues. Despite exhaustive efforts, SEACOM couldn't get its Sage implementation to handle the hierarchy needed to manage purchase order approvals effectively. The workflow approval process also proved very rudimentary, which forced the company to create manual workarounds.

"The delegation of authority not always enforced," Wilbraham says. "Getting orders issued meant people would run around with pieces of paper getting others to sign things. Then the order had to be entered into the system. That process didn't work really well."



Company

SEACOM
<https://seacom.co.za>

Industry

Telecommunications:
Internet Service, Submarine Cable
Data, Fiber, and ICT provider

Number of Employees

Approx. 300 full time employees

Location

Headquarters: Magaliessig, South Africa, with operations in South Africa, Tanzania, Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, Europe, France, and Mauritius

Products

Acumatica General Business Edition with:

- Advanced Financials
- Fixed Assets
- Project Accounting
- Exchange Integration
- Multiple Entities
- Inventory Management
- Deferred Revenue Management
- Solver BI360
- Microsoft Power BI
- YayPay Accounts Receivable Automation

Customer Social Sharing Details



www.facebook.com/SEACOM



www.twitter.com/SEACOM



www.youtube.com/user/SeacomLive



www.linkedin.com/company/seacom-ltd

Partner Details



4Sight
<http://4sight.cloud>

“As we went to a higher volume of transactions, we needed closer control over liabilities and to make sure everything matched up well, and that didn’t work very well either,” he adds.

It became increasingly obvious that SEACOM needed a much more robust, cloud-based platform. “Having something cloud-based was very important since we sell cloud services and connectivity. So it was important for us to walk the talk and have a cloud-based ERP,” Wilbraham says.

SOLUTION

Robust, Flexible, Open ERP

A new ERP needed to offer self-service, so SEACOM did not need to call a consultant whenever it wanted to change something. In addition, they required a solution that provided workflow management, robust reporting, and the ability to consolidate multiple currencies automatically.

“In Sage, we had to manually load exchange rates every day,” Wilbraham says. “Manually entering that information and other data takes time away from AP and AR, and even if it was a small amount of time on each task, cumulatively it adds up.”

SEACOM executives also evaluated Microsoft Dynamics, Sage ACCPAC, Oracle NetSuite, and SAP B1.

“We were not convinced at the time of Microsoft Dynamics cloud credentials because they were just going to the cloud, and we just thought they were a bit immature for our requirements,” Wilbraham says. ACCPAC was an old legacy product, and Oracle and SAP B1 “fell out pretty quickly due to their prices, which were pretty onerous.”

In addition, “One or two staff members had been through prior NetSuite implementations and dug their heels in, and were adamant that it was not the way to go.”

SEACOM had a long partnership with Bernard Ford, who guided SEACOM through various technology projects. Now at 4sight, Ford suggested SEACOM look at Acumatica, a Cloud ERP provider known for its flexibility, open APIs, and scalability.

Acumatica: Long Term Scalability

“He thought Acumatica would give us better longevity and be a better solution,” Wilbraham says. “Acumatica’s licensing model and transactional tiers it offers were important as was its ability to consolidate multicurrency, which was critical from a reporting and auditing standpoint.”

He also liked Acumatica’s “report generation, workflow management, and that it offered a lot of self-management, which really appealed to me.”

SEACOM agreed and chose Acumatica and did not look back.

Acumatica’s implementation went well, Wilbraham says. “Everything worked.”

SEACOM relied on a dedicated project manager who worked with functional teams to ensure data was lean, open POs were transferred, and historical transactions were entered. At the time of deployment, SEACOM had 11 entities and one consolidation entry. Today, SEACOM has 20 entities in Acumatica, each with multiple divisions operating with multiple currencies.

“Previously, we had to consolidate everything in Excel,” Wilbraham says. “It was difficult to get data into the system with the multiple currencies. Life became a lot easier with Acumatica.”

BENEFITS

Better Decisions with Real-Time Data

SEACOM can now access a deeper level of data and strategic insights executives use to make better decisions and make them very quickly. Acumatica surfaces data in real-time, so executives immediately identify what’s happening across the business and make course corrections promptly rather than relying on months-old, historical data.

“One thing we are fanatical about is measuring the business in terms of cash receipts, which was seriously onerous before,” says Wilbraham. “Now we have a generic inquiry for cash receipts throughout the business linked to a Power BI model, and we’ve been using it ever since. I now consistently get information out of the application using the GI tool to see exactly what’s happening in real-time.”



“Acumatica has been the oil in the cogs to enable the rapid expansion. We’ve deployed Acumatica to 13 companies in five months, so we know we can easily get new companies up and running on the platform very quickly.”

– Warren Wilbraham,
Chief Financial Officer,
SEACOM

Acumatica enables customers to examine spending across regions and countries using data Acumatica pulled and analyzed through Power BI. Executives analyze spending from various suppliers, identify the benefits and commitments associated with each spend, and what to do to obtain the most beneficial pricing.

“That ability to get information has been fundamental to us.”

Previously, SEACOM had trouble allocating customer receipts as they paid. With Acumatica, “we implemented a configuration that saved two hours a day for the person handling that cash flow.” Acumatica also automatically manages bank statements. As a result, the accounting team no longer needs to download and import statements, saving even more time.

“These little things add up,” says Wilbraham. “We are looking at saving accountants 10 to 15 percent of their time every month, which means they can focus on more important tasks.”

Reporting also greatly improved with Acumatica. SEACOM received standard reports quickly and seamlessly connected Acumatica with Solver BI360, a third-party corporate reporting tool. “We send POs out quicker because they are automatically distributed, and provision services to customers faster, which allows us to maintain a competitive advantage.”

Seamless Connections to Other Applications

Wilbraham says open functionality and connectivity are very important to the company, even though they did not initially consider Acumatica’s open architecture and APIs key factors in their purchasing decision. In addition to Solver, SEACOM uses Microsoft Power BI to help employees understand and visualize changes to the top 13 dashboards. SEACOM easily connected its custom-built billing application and Enterprise Service Pass to Acumatica and automatically transfers information between the different systems.

“Having that open API and flexibility is key, and we’re seeing that more and more,” Wilbraham says, adding they also connected YAY Pay for payroll and love the automated way Acumatica sends reminders to customers.

Acumatica has an easy-to-use and intuitive interface that makes it easy to onboard new employees no matter what country they reside in, says Wilbraham. “Acumatica is exceptionally easy to navigate, is very intuitive, and super easy to learn. The mobile app makes life a lot easier” for executives and employees in the field.

“Training takes only a half an hour to get functional, and that’s all you need to do what you need. Getting people up to speed was easy.”

Multiple Acquisitions in Multiple Countries

SEACOM’s rapid expansion continues, Wilbraham says. “We are looking at several acquisitions going forward, and deploying them quickly with Acumatica is critical. We’ve deployed Acumatica to 13 companies in five months, so we know we can easily get new companies onto the platform very quickly.”

He estimates the workforce will soon grow to more than 500 employees.

With Acumatica’s transactional licensing model, Wilbraham doesn’t worry about expensive per-seat licensing costs. “It becomes very easy for Acumatica to stay in the game with its licensing model,” Wilbraham says. “It’s very easy to add extra entities and transactions and not have to spend months and months training people.”

Scalable Platform for Continued Growth

Growing a company as quickly as SEACOM isn’t easy, and any company tackling multiple acquisitions and offering services in numerous countries faces many challenges. But with Acumatica, Wilbraham says SEACOM has a solid financial and technology platform he can trust that can scale to meet their evolving needs. For example, Acumatica provides a centralized ERP platform with a standard chart of accounts that handles reporting for all of its businesses.

“I haven’t been limited in anything I want to do with the platform, and that includes commercial limitations,” he says. “Anything we wanted to do is available and reasonably priced; Acumatica is a great product that can be geared to different business levels.”

In addition, “We don’t need to think about what ERP we might need in the future because Acumatica delivers what we need, whether we are changing the business we have or businesses we are moving into. Acumatica accelerates our decision-making processes.”



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