

mrc Productivity Profile

FACED WITH THE CHALLENGE OF ROLLING OUT JBA TO NINE COUNTRIES IN JUST SIX MONTHS, CONVERSE FOUND MRC TO BE THEIR VITAL MISSING LINK.

'To say that mrc met our requirements would be doing it a disservice - it appears that within our JBA working environment there is nothing it can't do.'

Ian Warne, Head of IT, Converse

High praise indeed from such a prestigious company. How in just 6 months did **mrc** warrant such a statement?

MRC & CONVERSE: A SLAM-DUNKING SUCCESS

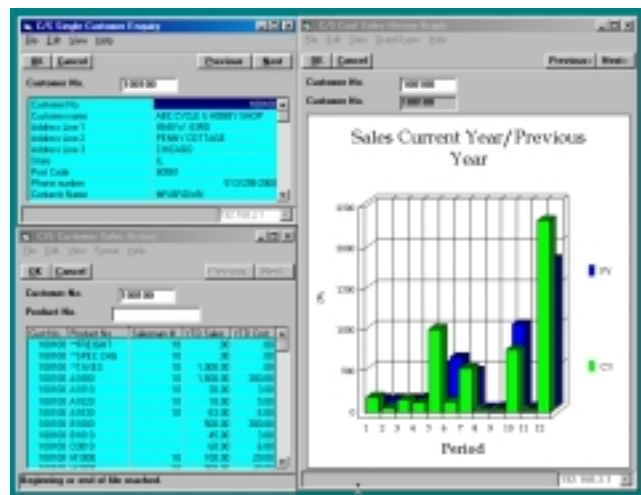
As the manufacturer of arguably the most famous shoe of all time: the canvas All Star; Converse and the history of sporting footwear, particularly basketball's, walk hand in hand. Whilst history is an important contributory factor to their culture, in order to maintain a position at the front of this fast paced and fickle business sector, they have had to continuously innovate.

Enter the Converse All Star He:01, the first basketball shoe to contain helium. Held within a capsule in the heel, helium combines the essential athletic qualities of lightness and cushioning, to create a radical breakthrough in shoe technology.

Company technology and innovation are not restricted to the product. As a global enterprise, in order to maintain their competitive edge, there was a growing need to utilise the ever-increasing range and depth of information available across the company, internationally. Ian Warne, as Head of IT, enjoyed the responsibility of evaluating the company structure and implementing a strategic solution that would enable each arm of the company to access and work with a large amount of common, up to date information. Fed from the UK and USA, it would be a one-stop data point.

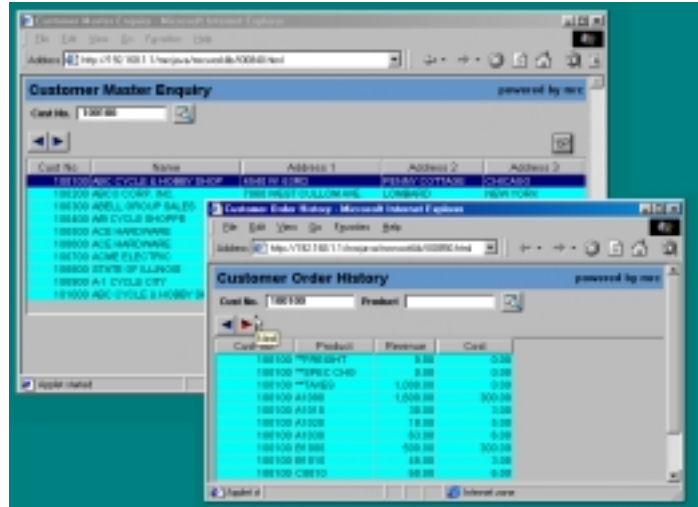
After exploring the range of business systems that could deliver this, he settled on JBA, which was to be ambitiously (and successfully) rolled out to 9 countries in just 6 months. With the decision made, the key requirement was to ensure that the system would be running at the required level through JBA by the end of June 1999.

Within the overall solution, report writing was an essential part. The driving premise was that all areas of the company would be able to access the available data and write their own reports. This would offer considerable savings in both time and costs (not having to rely on software house programmers), empower non-IT staff to utilise their business knowledge and offer increased efficiency.



After comparing the reporting tools available one stood out: the **mrc-Productivity Series**. Offering Java, data mining, green screen generation, web-based AS/400 access and the most powerful report writer available, in one integrated product, **mrc** offered the best way forward within a JBA business system.

Engineered to get the user out of the blocks immediately, with a minimum of investment, in their existing environment over existing files and with just two days training, **mrc** was perfect for Converse. '**mrc enabled us to fully utilise our data within days not weeks**' Ian Warne explained. '**It was crucial to get detailed information out of the system and maximise our investment**'.



Taking Control of IT

The desire to present easily digestible information from the JBA business system in a form that was relevant to company mechanics drove the implementation of **mrc**. In essence **mrc** gave Converse the freedom and flexibility to present the data in the way that worked for them, rather than the way imposed by JBA, and access information that would otherwise be unavailable from a practical point of view.

David Spindler, Converse's Information Analyst, cites the following three short examples.

● Information Our Way

'JBA reports on a shoe size level, and with Converse producing approximately 300 different shoes in 18 sizes this meant reports of 500 plus pages, going into details that were irrelevant to the way we worked. We simply wanted to see it at product style level. **mrc** allowed us to summarise the data to this level.'

He expands: 'My speciality is with PC-based formats and so I was initially wary of the **mrc-Productivity Series**. However I was almost immediately writing detailed reports on the AS/400 and Client Server. The great thing about **mrc** is its independence. Without being reliant on just Microsoft or IBM, it is able to use the right tool for the right job.'

● Financial Reporting

'JBA includes the ability to define the date range for each financial period. This is very useful but presents problems with reports. For financial reporting we need to view all data, including that found outside the ledgers, by financial periods. To all other reporting tools this is a major problem, but with **mrc** it's a non-issue, letting you get on with the job.'

● Cost & Margin Reporting

'Cost Price was another technical issue that became a non-issue due to the power of **mrc**. The JBA system stores cost prices at the value when orders are placed. However in our industry we not only take orders for as much as 12 months ahead, but also need to keep track of at least two different cost prices. This business requirement was instantly overcome with **mrc**. So it's simple. Now, for all cost and margin reporting we use **mrc**'.

The ability **mrc** gave Converse to write new RPG and VB code without employing any programmers was beneficial in two core areas. The code worked independently over the files without affecting the JBA code, maintaining the integrity of any program written by JBA, and so allowing continued support for each one.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it allowed Ian to maximise the skills of his staff. Prior to **mrc** they had an IT team of 6, primarily concentrating on supporting just the UK, two of whom were programmers. By deploying standard JBA wherever possible and using **mrc**, they now have just five staff supporting nine European countries. The structure of the department has been optimised. With no need for permanent programmers, he could employ those with business enthusiasm and knowledge, able to quickly utilise information, build applications and offer working solutions.

The Converse Bureau

With the system infrastructure taking shape, Ian could start to concentrate on delivering his vision of the one stop data point. His aim was to take this further than simply providing the information; it would include tools by which the user could easily extract and analyse the information that they wanted, whether it be internationally or domestically, utilising everyday Excel skills.

Here is where **mrc's** strengths bore fruit, acting as the bridge, facilitating the transfer of data in a form that could be accessed by the user and manipulated quickly and easily into a report that was relevant to that individual. No longer would IT be bombarded with requests for everyday reports. The users were empowered to drive the system and the 'Converse Bureau' was born.

Updated every week it would contain up to date company-wide information from the JBA system, allowing the more efficient running of the business fundamentals, such as stock levels, orders and deliveries. This information was not the end result, it was merely the set of building blocks for each individual to use to develop reports, analyse fluctuations and patterns, build orders and effectively manage their area of the business.

The success was so immediate that Converse is already reaping the benefits of increased profitability. Ian Warne estimates that **'within 1999/2000 the Converse Bureau is on target to produce a profit improvement of 2 percent plus.'**

The Future's Bright

This is only the start. As more applications are developed through **mrc**, so they will be added to the Bureau. Those under current development include Debtor Analysis, Forecasting / Planning and Trial Balance.

From here they plan to gain further efficiencies. The quicker the information is made available and the more up to date it is, so the easier it becomes to achieve the optimum business performance. Web pages seem to offer the most attractive alternative to the CD format currently used and here too, **mrc** is perfectly placed to continue to take a leading role. In fact as David Spindler surmised - **'mrc continues to open up possibilities for Converse – AS/400, Client Server, Java - the sky's the limit. As a pure data extraction tool, mrc can't be beaten. The more you use it the more you find it can do.'**

By marrying the respective strengths of JBA and **mrc**, Converse has in a very short time been able to change the way the company operated, making IT work effectively for everyone. The impact of being able to access and use up to date company information can be felt throughout the company, already delivering increased efficiency and profitability.



mrc

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