

RAM goes well with your.. ram

It is a brave man who admits that something in which he has invested much time and money is no longer up to the job.

This situation often applies to in-house IT systems.

When the project was first embarked upon there was good intention and every belief that the end product, being purpose-built, would be exactly what was needed. The right people were involved, significant investment in both time and money was made – although usually more than was originally intended – and the end product was pretty near what was planned.

But things inexorably move on. The business changes, system modifications need to be made, and while it still does the job there are failings and shortcomings that cannot be rectified.

Also, IT technology moves immensely quickly. Both hardware and software are now available that allow for more flexible systems. No more are cumbersome mainframes required, no longer do billing runs need to take days, and no longer do enhancements to the system need an in-house IT expert to make coding changes. In fact, no longer does a company need to take responsibility for running and maintaining its computer system.

Off-the-shelf packages are available that run on PCs and have software that can be easily modified to meet revised business requirements.

UK-based Real Asset Management (RAM) offers a suite of products in its Series 4000 range designed specifically to provide what it calls a "Total Transport Solution".

This includes "Monitor 4000" for intermodal operators, shipping companies and freight forwarders to manage their business; "Rental 4000" designed specifically for leasing and rental companies to manage daily operations and long-term business activities for all types of intermodal equipment; and "Repair 4000", a repair



Keith Dolby: software upgrades can be achieved 'easily and quickly'

module that works in conjunction with the other two.

Like most new IT systems, RAM's Series 4000 suite is PC-based, which makes for ease of use and simple implementation because all that is needed is a standard PC and internet connection. This allows staff, customers, agents and designated others access to the host data. Initial set-up is pretty much as simple as loading any new piece of software, although RAM supplies on-site experts for any new installation.

Keith Dolby, MD at RAM, says that Monitor 4000 provides a central data repository that can be accessed globally by the sales and operations staff of intermodal operators. Errors in orders, bookings, despatch plans, cost forecasts and all other business elements are minimised, and efficiency improved because standard information is used throughout the organisation.

The Rental 4000 module provides a flexible infrastructure purpose-designed for companies that lease out ISO containers, reefers, tanks, trailers and other types of intermodal equipment.

All inventory information is held on the system, including full technical specifications, fittings, approval dates, test due dates, digitised images and movement history. Managed fleets can be handled with

ease because of simple modification and change of ownership capability.

Dolby says the commercial side of the leasing activity is catered for by Rental 4000 having facilities for proposals and contracts to be prepared, following which all contractual terms and conditions are stored in the system. Upon receipt of an off-hire notification from the lessee, Rental 4000 generates a user-specified range of notifications including off-hire confirmation details, survey information and repair authorisations. All documents are produced using mail merge or Crystal Reports and can be emailed, faxed or printed automatically.

Information from the system can be interfaced with virtually any accounting system, and the software can run on most operating systems, giving users the freedom to manage their business globally across a variety of hardware platforms.

Repair 4000 manages the repair process of lessors' business and fully integrates with the Rental and Monitor modules, as well as third-party storage and repair depots. The system provides for detailed analysis of repairs and maintenance by equipment type and user, and includes a user configurable disposal algorithm to ensure that repair money is not spent unwisely.

Repair 4000 works in conjunction with all EDI and Cedex codes, but can also handle spreadsheet or other e-mail notifications from depots and other third parties. Repair progress of equipment is monitored through the system and can be accessed – with appropriate security – by customers, surveyors etc.

Dolby says that there are many systems still being used by companies in the leasing and intermodal operating business that are outdated in both their ability to do the job and in the flexibility they offer the users. "A quick look at our 4000 product will convince them that they can upgrade easily and quickly."

Embarcadero and Savi make a team

Embarcadero Systems Corp (ESC), the supplier of technology support for more than 30% of cargo containers moving through US west coast ports, has formed a service partnership with Savi Networks to implement RFID-based systems at terminal facilities throughout the country.

Savi provides an information services product called SaviTrak, which incorporates RFID and other automatic identification and data collection technologies at ports to enable shippers,



Beedenbender: new president

logistics service providers and transport companies to manage and monitor

shipments over a secure internet connection.

The agreement calls for ESC to implement solutions at port and terminal facilities, and to provide systems integration of automated data collection points with SaviTrak information services and other management systems.

Richard Beedenbender has been appointed to replace Scott Skillman as president of ESC. Beedenbender joins ESC following four years at Descartes/NeoModal, a global provider of logistics and supply chain management solutions.

IAS launches 'M&R-in-a-box'

International Asset Systems (IAS), provider of asset management services, has modified its Equipment Repair Cycle application, which is used by many ocean carriers, scaling it for use by smaller operators.

"M&R-in-a-Box," offers the same functionality but on a smaller scope. It provides internet-based repair estimates for up to 25 M&R vendors, as well as point-and-click M&R estimate processing, a suite of M&R management reports, on-site training and support.