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Garbage **In**, Garbage **Out**

Z Option Helps AOL Accelerate Transactional Entry to Set Up the Foundation for Real-Time Reporting

AOL, a leading multinational brand, found itself wasting time on manual financial processes, specifically pulling data from SAP ERP Financials to perform actions in Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. This cumbersome process also prevented the company from being positioned to achieve real-time reporting results and ultimately utilize predictive analytics. To help automate processes and prepare the landscape for real-time reporting, AOL implemented Z Option's GLSU solution. Tim Curtin, Solution Specialist at Z Option, sat down with Robert James, a Senior Manager at AOL with over 20 years of financial systems experience, to discuss the solution and its benefits.

Q: What initiatives do you focus on at AOL?

I lead efforts to transform AOL's accounting systems into a global landscape with new companies in Europe and Asia. Primarily, I work in the financials and controlling areas and specifically lead process improvement initiatives concerning SAP solutions.

Q: Tell me a little about the SAP environment at AOL and what processes needed improvement.

AOL first implemented SAP R/3 in 2006 with lots of custom development. We've recently updated to the latest enhancement pack and are currently on SAP ERP 6.0. We needed to improve the custom program to upload journal entries that used a CSV file. As it was, the accountants had to work very hard to manually pull data from the SAP system, perform actions in Microsoft Excel, make a calculated journal entry, and then convert this entry to the CSV format. We also needed to automate the loading of trial balances for new companies — the complex script we were using made it mandatory for the IT department to be involved.

Q: What were AOL's primary needs when looking for a solution?

First, we needed quicker preparation, validation, and loading of journal entries. We were also looking for validation on WBS elements for large postings of 5,000 to 6,000 lines and automated trial balance loads with different currencies. And finally, we wanted our German accountants to be able to upload numbers that use commas in place of decimal points. Because our custom journal upload program worked using CSV files, commas would not work without radically changing the program.

Q: What results did you see after implementing the GLSU solution?

The need for IT involvement was significantly reduced as there was no need for ABAP coding or support of the CSV file format or creating complex scripts. GLSU provided much needed time savings with validations and the auto-attach source workbook functionality. Change management was also very simple because the spreadsheet functionality in GLSU is similar to Microsoft Excel.

More About Z Option's GLSU Solution

An SAP-certified solution for loading financials data into SAP systems, GLSU provides SAP professionals with a flexible and intuitive spreadsheet interface for collecting and posting transactions to the SAP ERP back end. It uses a combination of configurable spreadsheet interfaces and custom ABAP components to provide a place to build data-entry applications, a configurable workspace, and extensive pre-verification of data to ensure accuracy. Companies use GLSU for creating travel and expense templates, uploading legacy cutover files, automating recurring journal entries, purchase card processing, controlling and profitability analysis updates, payroll, multi-thousand line entries, miscellaneous vendor postings, and more. To learn more about Z Option, visit www.zoption.com.

Q: Any final thoughts regarding process improvement and real-time reporting?

We had a saying when it came to preparing our landscape for real-time reporting: garbage in, garbage out. In order to utilize the functionality of real-time reporting, process improvements must take place at the data-entry level. GLSU has allowed us to completely revamp our former procedures into a more robust and time-saving process. ■

Tim Curtin is a Solution Specialist with extensive hands-on SAP experience that allows him to work with various SAP customers to assist their overall business needs. Prior to joining Z Option, Tim worked in many different roles within the natural gas and retail propane industries.

Robert James is a Senior Manager at AOL with over 20 years of experience with financial systems. He has led efforts to transform AOL's accounting systems into a global landscape with new companies in Europe and Asia, focusing primarily on financials and controlling.