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InformationWeek
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SAP Rollout Doesn't Come Easy For Kimberly-Clark

In a three-year, \$100 million deployment of SAP software at 32 mills, the consumer goods company learned that employee acceptance and training is often the biggest hurdle.

By Mary Hayes Weier, [InformationWeek](#)

June 21, 2007

URL: <http://www.informationweek.com/story/showArticle.jhtml?articleID=199905967>

Kimberly-Clark, the maker of Huggies diapers, Kleenex tissues, and Cottonelle toilet paper, has learned that a massive [SAP](#) implementation is rarely cozy or soft.

The consumer goods company, with \$17 billion a year in revenue, has just wrapped up deployment of SAP's enterprise-resource planning [software](#) in 32 North American manufacturing mills, an effort that took three years and cost more than \$100 million, said Kay Chase, a company IT senior analyst closely involved with the project, in an interview. What's more startling: the \$17 million price [tag](#) to train 16,000 employees, many of them mill workers, on the new software.

"This was an aggressive undertaking, because a lot of people in the mills did not use computers," says Chase. "We were starting from scratch on how to use a [mouse](#) to how to work in the SAP system."

Kimberly-Clark's experience points to an issue that sometimes gets forgotten in the discussion of lengthy [ERP](#) implementations: the toll and time it takes to get people to use a new system, and use it properly. That's a particular problem in manufacturing, where skilled laborers are suddenly expected to get up to the speed of power desktop users when many have spent little time with PCs.

"They weren't really happy when we brought this in," Chase said, adding that there was a great improvement in acceptance rates once employees learned the system.

It's often assumed the biggest challenge of ERP deployments is software complexity. SAP has been moving its software to [Web services](#) and service-oriented architectures with the promise that businesses will soon see the time for ERP deployments shrink from years to months. But technological improvements don't always impact how quickly an employee base can shift to a new way of working.

A huge help to Kimberly-Clark, said Chase, was the use of software from Knoa Software that monitors how employees use the system, called Knoa Experience and Performance Manager for SAP. Knoa falls into a group of software apps that Forrester Research calls IT end user experience monitoring. Forrester projects the market to grow 20% this year to \$138 million, and cites HP Software (through its Mercury acquisition) and CA (through its Wily Technology acquisition) as market players, in addition to Symantec, Compuware, and Quest Software. Knoa also makes versions of its software for [Oracle](#) Siebel implementations and for general enterprise app implementations.

In 2004, Kimberly-Clark began its implementation of SAP software that handles such business processes as req-to-check, accounting-to-reporting, plant maintenance, and materials management. In the mills, this means an employee working a Kleenex tissue machine no longer picks up the phone and calls the parts department to replace something broken, with a parts employee recording the request on a tablet of paper. Instead, a mill worker creates a work order with a click of a mouse, which sends an automatic alert to someone in the parts store. Kimberly-Clark can go back into the work order to capture such data as how long it took to fix the machine, how long the machine was down, and compare that data to the performance of other mills.

The Knoa software sends the IT department an alert if a user stalls in a particular area of an application. This helped Kimberly-Clark identify problem areas of an application and spot trends, and in some cases create reference cards for employees. Chase said in one instance, by using the software to identify a specific problem area that was simply addressed with reference cards, the company estimated it saved \$395,000 it would have spent to put those people through training again.

By watching users' transactions with the systems, Kimberly-Clark also was able to identify when there was a problem with the SAP software rather than improper use. "We wanted to understand what was slowing down the system," Chase said. "Did people not understand what was going on in their screens, or was the screen they were viewing slow? We realized there were things in the system causing problems, too."

Chase said she's gotten a lot of interest in the SAP rollout by attendees of SAP's Sapphire and user group conferences. Many manufacturers, she said, still appear to be transitioning off homegrown and [mainframe](#) systems to packaged ERP. "We're on the leading [edge](#) with what we're doing, and everyone has wanted to hear what we have to say," she said.

More SAP rollouts are planned for next year at Kimberly-Clark, including an order-to-cash system. Kimberly-Clark also is beginning to take its rollout of the four initial business processes in North America to its operations in 37 other countries.



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