Global Energy Company Increases Efficiency by Automating IT Service Requests

Puleng Technologies helps Sasol save time, reduce costs, and increase user satisfaction with self-service catalog.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cisco Partner: Puleng Technologies

Customer: Sasol

Industry: Energy and Chemicals

Location: Johannesburg, South Africa

Number of Employees: 34,000

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

- Increase operational efficiency by replacing costly manual IT service request processes
- Reduce order mistakes, delays, and user frustration
- Create a scalable IT service request process to support growth globally

SOLUTION & PARTNER

- Cisco Prime Service Catalog automates and streamlines IT service request process
- Planning and deployment services from Cisco partner Puleng Technologies

BUSINESS RESULTS

- Service requests and approval time have been reduced from weeks to days
- Significant reductions in costs and errors, with 20 percent fewer help desk calls
- Self-service catalog provides scalability to support expanding global workforce

Business Challenge

Cisco partner Puleng Technologies is a systems management and infrastructure automation solutions provider serving Central and Southern Africa. Steve James, Puleng's business development director, says that service delivery automation is one of the most pressing priorities for Puleng's customers. "Most large companies have multiple, conflicting, and disparate mechanisms for enabling end-users to order or request technology services for the workplace. As a result, users often complain that IT takes too long to fulfill the services they need to do their job. At the same time, IT service delivery teams spend an inordinate amount of time responding to requests, researching requirements, validating information, and providing status updates, which is a drain on valuable IT resources."

Puleng recently helped Sasol, South Africa's leading fuel provider, address this problem. Sasol has approximately 34,000 employees operating in 38 countries. The company mines coal in South Africa, produces gas in Mozambique, drills for oil in Gabon, and has chemical manufacturing and marketing operations in South Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Americas. The company is also commercializing its gas-to-liquids and coal-to-liquids technology internationally.

To help Sasol improve its technology services delivery, Puleng worked with Sasol Group IM General Manager Heather Fuller and her team that is responsible for Information Management (IM) Services. Her department provides technology services to about 28,000 end-users around the world. "Operational excellence is one of four corporate imperatives," says Fuller, "and one of the areas where we knew we could achieve greater operational efficiencies was handling requests for technology services from our end-users."

On any given day, the group's outsourced service desk receives over 1000 calls, and more than half are service order related. These requests range from complex, such as on-boarding a new employee, to simple, such as synchronizing a Blackberry to email. Whether the request is simple or complex, or even identical to requests that have been submitted hundreds of times previously, the end-user has to go through the same protracted, manual process. The first step is to fill out a multipage paper form and fax or email it to both a business line manager and an IM manager for approval. The signed form is then rescanned and sent to the service desk.

The approval process alone can take up to two weeks before the request is actually forwarded to one of several service providers for fulfillment or provisioning.

“It was a form that was universally hated,” says Fuller. “Users had trouble figuring out how to order what they needed, which meant that, after two weeks or more, a request might get rejected, because it was submitted improperly. So in addition to being frustratingly slow, the process was also error-prone.”

Sasol is also a rapidly growing organization, and the company was moving quickly to implement a new European service hub, with plans to add another to support the United States and Canada. “Clearly, we had to move fast to find a better way to handle service requests,” says Fuller, “or we would be multiplying and magnifying the problems exponentially as the company grows.”

Puleng describes Sasol IT as similar to other enterprises of its scale in that it is a combination of internal resources blended with a wide range of external services and technologies from global vendors. The company uses Cisco solutions extensively for networking as well as communications. However, the Cisco solution used to address this particular service request process transformation received the same rigorous scrutiny given to all new solutions and vendors, especially because of the complexity of the multivendor, multiservice provider involvement in the service request process.

Solution

René Pretorius, service management architect from Puleng, says that Sasol had rigorously evaluated several approaches to automating its IT service request process, including using its existing SAP tools. “We demonstrated Cisco Prime Service Catalog, which integrates a self-service portal, service catalog, and lifecycle management for workplace service requests, says Pretorious. “We were confident that this solution would give Sasol the intuitive, modern portal they were looking for to find and order IT services. In addition, Cisco Prime Service Catalog allows e-users to check the status of their own requests online, and provides the transparency for lines of business to perform their own analysis of the services that they are consuming.”

> “We feel confident that we can keep pace with our company’s global expansion, and Sasol users anywhere in the world will have fast service to the workplace technologies they need to be successful.”
> **— Heather Fuller, General Manager IM: Services, Sasol Group Services**

Once the company selected Cisco Prime Service Catalog, the clock started ticking on a very aggressive deployment schedule. “We did not want this to be one of those projects that takes forever to launch, or never launches at all,” says Zaidah Goosein, senior manager, IM Services. “Our strategy was to go live in 60 working days.”

Pretorius explains the “quick wins” approach for meeting the target launch date. “We recommended focusing on a subset of the most common service requests for the initial rollout. We eliminated requests that were too customized and those that were considered mission critical to avoid any sense of disruption. We focused on the most frequently requested, high-volume services. Automating those requests would have high visibility with business line managers and end-users, which would enable us to get results and feedback quickly.”

Once the service requests were identified, the next step was defining an approval process, called “One Sasol Way,” and then defining the provisioning workflow. If there were service-level agreements (SLAs) associated with any of the service requests, these SLAs were incorporated into Cisco Prime Service Catalog to automate tracking and reporting against the SLAs. The portal and each service were also given the appropriate branding and imagery. Finally, Puleng integrated Cisco Prime Service Catalog with Omada Identity Suite for user authentication, and an existing service desk and workspace support tool used by Sasol.

“We automated the process for more than 100 individual requests during the initial rollout, which is about five times more than we had originally estimated,” says Pretorius. “That is a testament to the elegant architecture and flexibility of the Cisco Prime Service Catalog software, and the ease of designing service request workflows within the product. We even lost one of our senior engineers on the project for about ten days and still met the launch deadline.”

Pretorius also credits strong project and communication management from Sasol for the success of the project. “The company was very committed and focused on meeting the operational and business objectives. We had strong executive support, which enabled all of us to achieve the milestones set by the team.”

Business Results

The business success of this service catalog project won the team a prestigious Sasol IM Services 2011 Project of the Year award from the company.

The results of the deployment have exceeded expectations for an automated approach to workplace service requests and fulfillment. More than 4000 requests were received and processed within the first two months of Cisco Prime Service Catalog going live. For most of the service requests, submission and approval times have been reduced from up to two weeks to a matter of days.

“Cisco Prime Service Catalog has made it simple and easy for users to locate and order the services they need,” says Pretorius. “The automated service request management process not only streamlines ordering, but it also makes it virtually mistake-proof, so users get the right services faster.” Users can also track the status of their orders online, reducing repeat calls to the service desk for answers. Calls to the service desk are down by an estimated 20 percent, and because the service desk is outsourced to a third-party service provider, the result is a measurable reduction in operating costs. Eliminating illegible forms has also reduced costly mistakes in order fulfillment.

“One of our goals for implementing an online service catalog and service request solution was to increase customer satisfaction. The feedback we now receive is positive and even appreciative,” says Fuller, “and that means better relationships with the users we serve. For us, that is as important as our goals for saving money and time.”

Puleng reports that the Sasol IM team has greater visibility into user requests, and can enforce policy compliance more easily than before. Requests are not only being approved faster, but the team can more easily identify a nonstandard or unauthorized request and reject those requests immediately. With increased visibility, the team has also been able to identify problems such as bottlenecks that they may not have been aware of previously, in order to address those issues with vendors, equipment, or contracts.

The automation of service requests will provide the scalability to support the company’s aggressive growth plans. “We feel confident that we can keep pace with our company’s global expansion,” says Fuller, “and Sasol users anywhere in the world will have fast service to the workplace technologies they need to be successful.”

"Sasol plans to move to a cloud-based IT environment to provide automated provisioning for data center requests and offer infrastructure-as-a-service in an internal private cloud," says Pretorius. "We are confident that implementing Cisco Prime Service Catalog will position the company to transition smoothly to this cloud-based model."

Next Steps

In the second phase, Fuller's team will add at least 100 more unique services to the catalog, including service packages to address more complex requests. Sasol is evaluating Cisco Request Center Reporting for identifying service request patterns and correlations to further streamline the service request process. "In the next phase, business line and IM managers should be better able to coordinate, manage demand, and also control budget more closely through detailed, automated charge backs," says Pretorius.

For More Information

Additional information about Cisco Prime Service Catalog can be found at http://www.cisco.com/go/service-catalog.

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