SAP BusinessObjects™

BROAD APPROACH HELPS AVANTIS MAINTAIN FOCUS

35% GROWTH WITH HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL STRATEGY

QUICK FACTS

Company

- Name: Avantis Information Systems
- Location: Sydney, Australia
- Web site: www.avantis.com.au
- Year founded: 2001
- SAP partner since: 2008
- Employees: 24

Business Model Summary

IT consulting firm with highly successful practice focused on SAP® BusinessObjects™ Edge Business Intelligence software, SAP Crystal Reports® software, and SAP BusinessObjects enterprise performance management solutions

Industries

- Banking
- Manufacturing
- Mining
- Telecommunications

The people at Avantis Information Systems can point to many ways they grew sales by 35% within one year – despite a global economy that was "down under" from almost every perspective. The general manager of the Sydney, Australia–based SAP® BusinessObjects™ partner, Colin Pearshouse, knows all the primary factors that made it happen – and one way it clearly did not: by chance. "If you believe in luck, go buy a lottery ticket," Pearshouse suggests.

Avantis – based on the word "avanti," which means "go forward" in several languages – was established in 2001, a year that was especially tough on the entire IT industry. Now an SAP gold partner, Avantis initially built its business in the aftermath of the dot-com collapse and post-Y2K slowdown. The company's strategic plan has methodically evolved over the years with sharp focus on business intelligence (BI) applications and other SAP BusinessObjects Edge solutions. From single-copy sales of SAP Crystal Reports® software to full-scale enterprise-wide BI deployments, Avantis has managed to consistently move forward under any market conditions.

While key competitors narrowed their focus on specific vertical markets, Avantis adopted a dual approach that continuously strengthens both vertical and horizontal expertise. This combination spans the entire spectrum of sales, installation, design, development, training, and support services that all types of companies require. They get it in one place from Avantis, which also injects unique industry-specific knowledge, yielding higher margins for Avantis as well as higher overall value to customers.

Reducing Customer Costs, Adding More BI Value

Pearshouse describes Avantis' mining industry experience as an example of the company's twofold strategy in action. "In this segment," he explains, "we established a definitive means of analyzing and assessing key performance indicators associated with expensive heavy equipment used across different types of mining operations."

The reporting that Avantis developed with SAP BusinessObjects Edge Business Intelligence software enabled substantial

Avantis information systems pty ltd

improvements in the selection of cost-effective machinery for new and existing mines. In yet another example, Avantis is helping an automotive industry client leverage these BI capabilities to better understand and address product defects.

"We've found that we can tackle vertical market challenges with horizontal strategies and vice versa," Pearshouse remarks. "BI opens doors much wider than meets the eye. It's not just for financial reporting and analysis. It's for driving down costs and improving operations from all standpoints."

Such insight and proven cost savings give Avantis a powerful competitive edge in multiple markets. Prospects frequently choose the company because of its reputation for quickly delivering tangible ROI and all the services that help ensure smooth implementation, user productivity, and ongoing best practices. The formula has worked well in manufacturing, banking, telecommunications, and other industries. Avantis' customer base now exceeds more than 120 companies in Australia.

"The long-term commitment we made to building our business in the BI market is met by SAP's commitment to channel partners like us," Pearshouse says, noting that Avantis' SAP partnership began when SAP acquired Business Objects in January 2008. "We proved ourselves to SAP, and they did the same to us. At first, we couldn't help but feel 'fear, uncertainty, and doubt' about a global leader in the software market acquiring our main vendor partner. That 'FUD' factor quickly turned to appreciation, as SAP demonstrated it was in it for the long haul. Instead of detracting from the partnership, they helped us take it to the next level."

Current customers are a key growth driver at Avantis, which typically retains clients for years, not months, after completing initial projects. The first customer from 2001 is still with the company today. Current accounts typically represent 50% to 60% of total sales. That retention clearly correlates to how Avantis engages its prospects and customers – with people who "don't let bureaucracy stand in the way of making the right decision," Pearshouse adds. Avantis spells out ideal license and service options based on diverse budgets and objectives, with solving customer business problems as the mantra.

Customers Turn Into "Recruiters"

Avantis applies an integrated marketing strategy that keeps the company in front of current customers while cultivating additional opportunities. Deep customer relationships work hand in hand with SAP demand-generation campaigns, making it easy for the company to host more effective seminars on new offerings. Customers who attend these events help Avantis, in effect, recruit more clients in a non-invasive way.

"It's really a community or ecosystem concept – something we're taking beyond traditional boundaries," Pearshouse elaborates. "The SAP Extended Business program exemplifies what I mean. We essentially 'extend' our SAP expertise in conjunction with complementary services from other competent solution providers that may not choose to invest heavily in a direct SAP relationship. We're blazing the trail as a 'master VAR' in this program. Our 'members' made five license sales in just a few weeks after we got started, basically by sharing presales resources, demos, marketing collateral, and other materials and counsel to support their efforts."

The "trail" that Pearshouse oversees at Avantis is virtually free of what he calls "hierarchical traps." Instead of multiple managerial levels in selling, a single national sales manager keeps the company's Sydney and Melbourne offices on top of a full plate of leads – and ever-increasing license sales as well as an expanding range of SAP BusinessObjects Edge solutions.

"SAP keeps us informed and prepared as they introduce new products and services," Pearshouse underscores, referencing new SAP developments in budgeting, planning, and consolidation software. "We're clearly growing to-

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Colin Pearshouse, General Manager, Avantis Information Systems

gether, and I believe a rising number of other channel partners are tasting – or fully experiencing – similar success."

Low Overhead Yet 24x7 When and Where Needed

"Flex-time" consulting and support packages rank high among the reasons the Avantis team wins more deals than it loses. These customizable pre- and postsale services are performed by experienced, certified specialists in SAP BusinessObjects solutions that Avantis makes available 24x7 on-site, online, or by phone.

Avantis tightly manages overhead by hiring experienced personnel who can contribute more quickly and effectively than those with lesser skills. Two practice managers, one in each of the company's two offices, concentrate on the services side of the business. The national sales manager focuses heavily on product license sales, backed by an administrative accounts staffer, and the rest of the 24-person organization consists of consultants, with some doubling as trainers.

Extensive cross-training enables all team members to make business-building inroads from virtually any direction. "We don't draw lines in the sand," Pearshouse emphasizes. "Consultants and practice managers also sell products, and our national sales manager isn't limited to selling software licenses, for example. They can all engage in selling services, including training, which is a substantial aspect of our value proposition."

Pearshouse views keeping pace with growth as a "delicate balance" in resource management. He projects adding another six employees, mostly consultants, this year. He estimates that the company currently has 2,000 days of work in its pipeline.

Despite the far-reaching scope of Avantis' operations, Pearshouse doesn't consider the infrastructure and resource investments extraordinary. "We ramped up pretty rapidly from the beginning and are gaining even more momentum with SAP's presence. The breadth of products and services they develop for partners and customers is outstanding. There's a reason they're regarded as one of the world's most trusted corporations, and that brand equity and quality assurance only make our job easier as an SAP BusinessObjects partner."

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