

SPRING Technologies and EUROCOPTER, a winning partnership

When Eurocopter agreed to transfer a proprietary application used in its industrial process to SPRING Technologies, it strengthened a partnership that now makes a vital contribution to its production and service quality.

Paris, July 4, 2012

TRUST YIELDS RESULTS

“Our partnership with Eurocopter goes back to the end of the 1980s and perfectly illustrates the advantages that a major account can gain from trusting an innovative, high-performance SME to support its industrial product process”, says Gilles Battier, CEO of SPRING Technologies since 1994. Rewind to 1988, four years before the helicopter division of the French Aérospatiale group merged with the German Daimler Chrysler Aerospace AG to form the Eurocopter group. At the time, SPRING (Société de Productique et de Recherche en Informatique Numérique et Graphique) was still a very young SME that was growing alongside the emergence of CAD/CAM (Computer Aided Design & Manufacturing). Its core business was the development of custom software for major groups. Originally solicited by the automotive industry, SPRING diversified towards the aeronautical sector, when Eurocopter was looking for solutions to manage its technical documentation. “The FTA (automated technical data sheet) project, led by Marc Belluau and Jean-Luc Sturles, today at the head of Aérolia’s Méaulte site in northern France, was on the wish list for the company’s production and assembly lines. Its aim was to enable cross-corporate access to reference documents very precisely describing the sequence of actions performed by each operator.”

A SUCCESSFUL TRANSFER OF SPECIALIZED KNOWHOW IN PROCESSES AND CONTENT

Once the application had been completed to Eurocopter’s specifications, SPRING’s management realized they had a product that they could put out to many other industrial sectors. “We realized, even then, that the major software vendors were not offering anything comparable. This is why we suggested to Eurocopter that we transform the custom development into a commercial product that would become SPRING’s property. We emphasized the advantages that the group could enjoy from making the software a standard: reduced costs and contractual upgrades that would be even more useful if they were based on feedback from a broader user community. Eurocopter was impressed by our arguments and quickly agreed to transfer the functional knowhow embodied in FTA.” In 1989, SPRING consequently became a vendor, marketing RAFT, its product data management solution. This was based on FTA and specifications gathered from other manufacturers that enabled distinctions to be made between functions that were generic or specific to business areas. The solution went to market at the same time as the NCSIMUL machining simulation software, which was also to become a major success for SPRING Technologies. In 1993, Eurocopter deployed RAFT, superseding its proprietary FTA application.

Georges-Éric MOUFLE, Global Supply Chain Innovation Manager

“Eurocopter has been involved in a relationship with SPRING Technologies since 1988, when SPRING developed FTA (automated technical data sheets), the forerunner of WIPLINK, in response to our teams’ request for a solution for managing our reference documents. SPRING then deployed this solution on our UNIX machines. In 1989 we gave SPRING the go-ahead to develop the software into a commercial product, which went out originally as RAFT before being rebranded as WIPLINK in 2002. The ownership issues were more about the content of our technical data sheets than the software itself, and letting SPRING take over the development turned out to be a great move for Eurocopter. At the end of the 1980s, this software was not part of our core business, thus, it was better for us to develop it into an industry standard. We benefitted from the optimizations suggested by other customers and users, the lower costs, and the innovation that SPRING Technologies constantly delivers.

Today we have thousands of documents ranging in length from 3 to 300 pages. SPRING’s solution is perfectly dimensioned to Eurocopter’s standards and processes. We use it in the assembly of all our Écureuil, Dauphin, Super Puma, EC175, Tigre and

NH90 ranges, and also for our mechanical parts, sub-structures and in the manufacture of our rotor blades. We are now introducing it in the electrical workshop and MRO, and our helicopter repair service. In an increasingly strictly regulated engineering environment, it guarantees the quality and reliability of our products. We use it in our French, Brazilian and Spanish plants where it also facilitates relations with our domestic and foreign suppliers, and our handling of obsolescence issues. Innovation is still central to our collaboration with SPRING Technologies. Together we are currently looking ahead at the future generations of operator help that will be hitting the market five or ten years from now.”

Immediate updates

Based on Microsoft technologies, the software uses code that is standardized but largely user-definable, enabling users to adapt the generic functions to their own business needs. “The whole value of the product has developed to match the needs of the times”, adds Gilles Battier. “In 2002, we made the software more collaborative and geared to PC environments and renamed it WIPLINK. As the Web developed, along with new digital formats and constantly more powerful workflow techniques, we continued to transform it, building in state-of-the-art best practice. Today, users can create and manage complex technical documents containing digital, alphanumeric, audio and video data. This means that queries can be run quickly to identify information contained in a wide range of documents – for example a part or a process – and engineering changes can be implemented globally. By immediately circulating updates to all users in France and abroad we can be sure that they will get the most recent information they need for their day-to-day work.”

Guaranteed reliability

Looking back over nearly thirty years have you ever had any doubts about the value of working together? “Of course Eurocopter, which uses software from the major vendors for its ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) and PLM (Product Lifecycle Management), has wondered whether these suppliers might have equivalent offerings. In reality, our know-how is unique. Our very specific solution has proved its performance and robustness not only at Eurocopter but also at major groups like Alstom, Latécoère and Thales. Every year, Eurocopter asks us to develop upgrades or extensions. Currently, our aim is to broaden our solution, which already has 500 users, to aftermarket and MRO applications. Eurocopter no longer just sells aircraft, but also provides worldwide added-value service guaranteeing flightworthiness. To ensure that its aircraft remain fully operational throughout their very long lifetime, Eurocopter must guarantee that its customers enjoy worldwide maintenance and repair quality. One of the keys to this is immediately available and reliable documentation. This is all the more crucial as the helicopters vary not just from one generation to the next but also because of the customizations requested by customers. We are now in a position to help the group address this strategic issue, as well as the technological transformations of the future, for which we are a step ahead of the game. We are currently looking ahead together at the ways people will be working in the next five or ten years, and the idea of integrating virtual reality into aided assembly phases”, concludes Gilles Battier who also hopes that the solution will be deployed in all the EADS group subsidiaries, including Airbus.

SPRING TECHNOLOGIES PROFILE

SPRING Technologies is an international company which helps manufacturers to increase the productivity of their processes and production resources.

Its portfolio is built around two main focuses:

- Development of software solutions providing a set of integrated functions dedicated to production sites: post-processors library, machine tools and cutting tools, machining simulation and verification, optimization of manufacturing processes, publication of manufacturing content, real-time monitoring of production resource activity.
- Support services: consulting and integration with market solutions in CAD/CAM, PLM and MES, training & support

Founded in 1983, workforce of +100 engineers. Location Worldwide Headquarters: Paris. R&D Centre: Toulouse.

Foreign subsidiaries: Boston (USA), Beijing (China), Frankfurt (Germany) and Geneva (Switzerland).

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