ATB Financial: Performing the First Full Release Software Upgrade with Zero Downtime with SAP® MaxAttention™

ATB Financial needed to upgrade its banking services software from SAP and presented a challenge to its SAP® MaxAttention™ services team – perform the upgrade without any disruption to customer-facing processes. SAP rose to the challenge and gave ATB something no SAP software customer has experienced before: **a full release upgrade with zero downtime**.

Executive overview

Company
ATB Financial

Headquarters
Edmonton, Alberta

Industry
Banking

Products and Services
Financial services, wealth management

Employees
5,300

Revenue
C$8.5 billion (US$7 billion)

Web Site
www.atb.com

BUSINESS TRANSFORMATION

Objectives
- Upgrade banking services software from SAP and the SAP® Customer Relationship Management application to current levels
- Keep critical processes online throughout the upgrade, responding to all service requests within four seconds
- Completely avoid disruption to customers and the customer care center

Resolution
- Partnered with SAP MaxAttention™ services and established a coengineered project
- Employed an entirely new upgrade methodology pioneered by SAP
- Performed a successful proof of concept prior to production upgrade

The key benefits
- Upgraded the software with no impact at all on customers
- Responded to all service requests well within the four-second window
- Experienced no downtime

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"The banking services upgrade project is a great example of how SAP MaxAttention is helping us innovate and do things we never could do before."
Cathy Pasula-Jones, Vice President of Enterprise Services, ATB Financial

TOP BENEFITS ACHIEVED

0
Downtime during upgrade

0
Customer disruption during upgrade

<4 seconds
Response time on customer requests during upgrade

Avoid downtime and provide fast response time to customers

ATB Financial is the largest Alberta-based financial institution, with assets of C$43.1 billion. ATB has nearly 700,000 customers in 244 Alberta communities, providing 24x7 service online and at ATMs and points of sale as well as serving customers directly from its call center and its 172 branches and 135 agencies.

ATB Financial has one of the broadest SAP® software implementations in North American financial services. It uses a wide spectrum of SAP software including banking services, the SAP ERP and SAP Customer Relationship Management (SAP CRM) applications, and much more. ATB has employed SAP MaxAttention™ services ever since it first went live with SAP software in 2011. Over the years, as ATB's sophistication with SAP software grew, the role of SAP MaxAttention at the institution changed dramatically to become ever more strategic.

Recently, the partnership between ATB and SAP MaxAttention faced its toughest challenge to date. ATB had to upgrade its banking services software from SAP in order to meet the demands of the fast-moving financial services sector. Customers count on this software at all times for ATM, point-of-sale, and online transactions as well as assistance from ATB's customer care center. Therefore, taking the system off the air from customers or the care center even for a few hours was not an option.

Furthermore, ATB connects to the Interac network that handles the exchange of financial transactions in Canada. Interac requires a maximum four-second response time for approving or declining credit and debit card transactions. When this threshold is not met, a third-party takes over the request, which exposes ATB to risk because of automatic approvals and bypassing of certain fraud-prevention measures. ATB sought a better way.

A methodology never before used in production

As it always does with challenges of this magnitude, ATB consulted with its partners from SAP MaxAttention, who agreed that none of the conventional upgrade approaches would suffice. Instead, SAP presented an entirely new approach that had just been successfully demonstrated by SAP MaxAttention in a proof of concept (POC) with another Canadian customer. This approach is considered an "in-place" method that is very cost-effective, in that no additional hardware is required. It entails establishing a subsystem within the production system that allows transaction posting to the database to continue in real time and in parallel with the upgrade execution.

SAP MaxAttention began with a PoC using ATB's test environment and scripts that simulated firing 15 banking transactions per second at the system. The POC was highly successful: SAP and ATB learned a lot and eventually achieved the goals of zero downtime and four-second response time.

Based on the lessons learned during the POC, SAP and ATB moved on to the very substantial task of upgrading the production system. A key success factor was the tight collaboration established between the ATB Enterprise Services team, the embedded support team from SAP MaxAttention at ATB, and knowledge experts from the Customer Center of Expertise team. In the spirit of the Run Simple approach, this group fully managed the technical deployment of the engagement from initial concept to technical realization to execution and optimization of the end solution.

"SAP MaxAttention helps us do things better, faster, more easily, and with less risk – all of which bring financial wins. They know us, our business, and our systems. It's a great relationship."

Cathy Pasula-Jones, Vice President of Enterprise Services, ATB Financial

A model for the future of software maintenance

The team completed the project very successfully, achieving all goals in full. The system was never down, cutover happened with complete transparency to customers and internal ATB users, and all transaction responses were made well within the four-second window. Now that ATB's banking services software is completely up-to-date, the system is more supportable and a wealth of new functionality is available for deployment.

In recognition of the team's achievements, SAP bestowed its Hasso Plattner Founders' Award to the zero-downtime methodology, the most prestigious distinction awarded at SAP. "Zero-downtime maintenance intends to deliver a groundbreaking concept for the future of software maintenance," says the award citation.

"As a result of this upgrade, we have a list as long as your arm of new features and functions that are available to us. Our people and SAP did a great job. We make an outstanding team."

Cathy Pasula-Jones, Vice President of Enterprise Services, ATB Financial

SAP CRM upgraded with zero downtime

Because of the success of the banking services upgrade engagement, ATB followed by commissioning SAP to upgrade its SAP CRM application. Using lessons learned from the first project, an extended team from the Customer Center of Expertise successfully completed this second upgrade, which also achieved the zero-downtime target with no customer impact.

In fact, now that ATB knows how well SAP can contain downtime, it plans to make the methodology a pillar of all future upgrade projects with SAP MaxAttention.

SAP

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