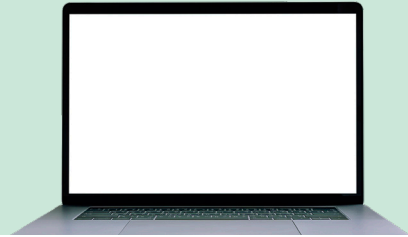# Unit4 ERP: highly recommended, even after 20 years

Materna Information & Communications SE

Materna is one of Germany's top 5 IT service providers. With more than 2,600 employees worldwide, group sales of EUR 355 million (2020) and the ambitious target of doubling these figures by 2025, the demands on Unit4 Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) are high as well. René Geilfus, President of Materna Enterprise Services: "Unit4 ERP is manageable, flexible and easily scalable – we highly recommend it."

Materna switched from the Quantum Mega-K booking system and several individual solutions for merchandise management and project management to Unit4 Agresso (now known as Unit4 ERP) in 2000.

The key benefits:

- Rapid implementation within 3.5 months

- Flexible and cost-effective: virtually no need for Unit4 support, in-house key users are responsible for support and customization

- Minimal resources required to manage the system, almost unchanged for 20 years

- High employee satisfaction, no additional training

- Easy integration with third-party systems

- Scalable and manageable

"Back in 2000, we were looking for a system that was capable of mapping our projects in the best possible way from a commercial point of view."
Materna was founded in 1980 in Dortmund, Germany, developing software for mainframe computers. With the boom in client systems, the company started to grow. Today, the Materna group serves a broad customer base, ranging

Industry
IT services

Location
Headquarters in Dortmund, Germany; international presence in 13 countries

Size
Around 2,600 employees, EUR 355.1 million sales

Product
Unit4 ERP

Challenges

Migration from an old financial accounting system characterized by cumbersome processes; switching from Excel-based financial controlling to Unit4 ERP for financial management/accounting, project management, operational reporting. Planning and management of the group and its growth, securing its leading position and its ambitious goals (doubling sales and staff between 2021 and 2025).

Key metrics

20 years
with virtually no need for further resources to manage the system

3.5 months
rapid rollout at headquarters and Materna subsidiaries

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"Manageability, even with a small team, is the most important thing for me."

René Geilfus
President of Materna Enterprise Services

from government agencies to industrial companies and airports. Materna focuses on the areas of Public Sector, Enterprise Service Management, Passenger Journey, SAP Transformation, Journey2Cloud, Cyber Security, Digital Experience, Sustainability & Reselience and Data Economy.

To this day, Materna sets the benchmark for how to attain a leading position in the IT sector, building the company over decades and outclassing many competitors in the process. The company has been using Unit4 ERP since 2000. René Geilfus, President of Materna Enterprise Services, recalls the time before the introduction of Unit4: "Back in 1999, I was working with a colleague from the Controlling department to describe the very first financial controlling concept for Materna. We were talking to the specialist departments and running workshops to evaluate what commercial information we had access to. How was it presented to staff? What information was missing, what did we need? Where were the pain points? And where does Materna want to go?"

"The aim was to bring these different worlds together to create one system."
René Geilfus and his team identified a whole range of pain points in 1999. When it came to the accounting system, Materna had been working for years with a product that no

longer met their expectations. Employees were missing key reporting functions and the system was not capable of analyzing certain data. "For example, it was always difficult to show the HR costs in relation to projects," explains René Geilfus. They had to make do with tricks and workarounds. "We used a project tracking system we had developed ourselves and worked with hour-based evaluations," he adds. Higher-level FP&A was based exclusively on Excel. There was no integrated order processing. The program was mainly used to generate outgoing invoices. René Geilfus summarizes the problem, explaining that "individual projects could only be managed on a decentralized basis and calculating financial key figures was a painstaking task."

Discussions with specialist departments, accounting and project managers revealed the core problems and an approach to solving them. René Geilfus: "Our accounting system focused purely on financials. We also had, cost center/cost unit accounting, plus an integrated sales and purchasing tool that allowed us to write outgoing invoices, but that was it. For our projects, we used the project tracking system we had developed ourselves, and we tried to provide the project managers with the project functions they needed. Our aim was to finally bring these worlds together. With a system that could map the projects in the best possible way from a commercial point of view."

"Wanted: a system without high consulting costs."
So Materna was looking for an integrated, flexible and modern ERP solution to implement its financial controlling concept, manage the individual business units and reorganize internal information controlling and reporting.

The central requirements were defined in the functional specification: The new system should be state-of-the-art in terms of technology, it should be flexible and manageable – and its administration should require minimal personnel resources. "We were looking for a software solution that, once the system had been implemented, could be easily adapted and extended by our key users – without high consulting costs," explains René Geilfus.

After evaluating several offerings and making a shortlist of many big names, Unit4 ERP (then known as "Unit4 Agresso") proved to be the best choice.

"It is extremely easy to customize Unit4 ERP."
Unit4 really stood out due to the cost-effectiveness and agility of the overall concept as well as its fast implementation and simple customization, which allowed Materna to set up a connection to its own timesheet solution. "Unit4 clearly outperformed its competitors on all these points. It really is extremely easy to customize the

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system to suit our own requirements," continues René Geilfus. "We could see that this product was state-of-the-art and that it was clearly ahead of the competition. I was also aware that I would be running the system with a relatively small team of key users, so it also needed to be quick to get to grips with. That proved to be the case. Even looking back today, Unit4 was the right decision." René Geilfus adds: "With other suppliers, the subsequent costs for customization and changes would have been significantly higher."

Only 3.5 months: rapid rollout at headquarters and Materna subsidiaries

An important criterion behind the choice was the speed of implementation predicted by Unit4. It went perfectly: Materna rolled out Unit4 ERP in just 3.5 months. The intense preparatory phase to evaluate all operational requirements across the various departments definitely paid off. René Geilfus: "We had a perfect and highly motivated interdisciplinary team – both from Unit4 and from our side. Introducing something new can sometimes be difficult when it involves replacing old systems. In our case, however, we were eager for change on all levels."

Materna then rolled out Unit4 ERP to a number of its subsidiaries, both in Germany and abroad – independently and without support from Unit4. René Geilfus: "Part of the reason for choosing Unit4 was because it is a multilingual system that can be deployed internationally. We have smaller subsidiaries in other countries with 50 to 100 employees where we gradually introduced a number of clients. Our requirements in this respect still haven't changed and Unit4 can handle them all."

The system has proven its flexibility, easy customization and robustness over the years. René Geilfus: "The customer benefits of the system back then were its fast implementation as well as its cost-effective and easy adaptation to existing systems. Today, I can add the simple integration with third-party systems to that list. For example, we added a smaller external solution to handle our incoming invoice archive. With Unit4's support, we were able to integrate it with Unit4 ERP very quickly. The cost and effort involved was flexible, reasonable and, in my view, absolutely justifiable. Unit4 still provides great value for money."

"There can't be many suppliers who could match that."

And what does René Geilfus think of Unit4 today, in view of the Materna group's growth? "I don't think there are many companies of this size that could run an ERP system with only two and a half administrators or employees, who are also responsible for many other tasks. And there can't be many suppliers who could match that." René Geilfus sums up: "Manageability is the most important thing for me. We can run updates ourselves, without support from Unit4 consultants. Some companies might be unable to work for a few days if there are major updates. We don't have that problem. ... A working relationship that has lasted more than 20 years is a rare thing these days. Would I make the same decision again today? Most likely. And if something doesn't quite fit into our project business, Unit4 ERP is easy to customize. I also think that developments such as virtual assistants, timesheets and the use of smartphones are interesting. I can definitely recommend Unit4 ERP for international companies."

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