

Scaling SAP Operations Without Scaling Headcount

Howdens Transforms SAP Operations with Intelligent Monitoring and Automations

Howdens, the UK's leading trade kitchen supplier, operates a complex and evolving SAP landscape that supports critical business processes across logistics, manufacturing, supply chain, and retail operations. As the environment expanded and moved to the Cloud, the SAP Basis team faced a challenge familiar to many SAP organizations: how to increase operational coverage and reliability without increasing headcount.

To achieve this, Howdens selected Avantra, the intelligent observability and automation platform purpose-built for SAP operations.

THE CHALLENGE

Supporting SAP Growth with Limited Resources

As Howdens' SAP landscape expanded and evolved, the Basis team faced increasing demands to deliver operational excellence across a growing estate while maintaining the same lean team structure.

Daily operational monitoring and health checks relied heavily on manual effort, consuming valuable Basis expertise that could have been better invested in strategic initiatives, cloud transformation, and continuous improvement. While the team maintained high service levels, obtaining a clear, real-time understanding of overall SAP health required significant time and effort.

Like many SAP customers, Howdens leveraged SAP Solution Manager as part of its operations toolkit. However, as the SAP landscape grew in complexity, the team sought a more streamlined approach to operational visibility - one that could surface meaningful insights quickly, reduce alert fatigue, and provide a simple view of system health across the entire estate.

As Robert Kennady, SAP Basis Engineer at Howdens, explains: "Solution Manager doesn't tell me red, amber, green."

The team also evaluated SAP Cloud ALM as part of its long-term SAP operations strategy. While Cloud ALM showed promise, Howdens required a mature, enterprise-ready solution capable of delivering comprehensive monitoring and operational oversight across both cloud and on-premises SAP environments.

With a major cloud transformation underway and an increasingly interconnected SAP ecosystem, the Basis team needed a platform that could provide end-to-end visibility, support proactive operations, and help scale SAP management without scaling headcount.

THE SAP LANDSCAPE

Supporting a Growing Hybrid Environment

Howdens operates a diverse SAP estate that includes SAP PI, Transportation Management (TM), Quality Issue Management (QIM), SAP Commerce, and SAP Manufacturing systems.

The environment has evolved significantly over time, beginning on-premises before transitioning to SAP RISE in the cloud. This journey introduced considerable complexity, including zero-trust architecture requirements, firewall management, port configuration, and connectivity challenges between cloud and on-premises systems.

Avantra's agentless architecture proved particularly valuable during this transition.

When Howdens started its cloud go-live on a Friday and completed it by Sunday afternoon, Avantra was fully operational that evening so the team could get some rest with the comfort that systems were being monitored through the night. Monitoring RFC connections, ABAP dumps, system availability, and critical connectivity layers without requiring additional infrastructure deployment, gave the team peace of mind.

As the company's digital footprint and integration landscape have continued to expand, Avantra has enabled the team to increase monitoring coverage and operational control without increasing team size.

THE SOLUTION

Intelligent Monitoring, Compliance, and Automation

Today, Howdens runs more than 500 automated daily checks, alerts, and workflows through Avantra. The platform provides predictive monitoring across the entire SAP landscape, replacing fragmented monitoring tools with a single, centralized view of system health. Operations teams can immediately identify issues through intuitive dashboards that surface the information that matters most. Tailored thresholds and intelligent alerting have dramatically reduced noise while improving visibility into emerging issues before they impact users. Instead of reacting to large volumes of alerts, the team can focus on meaningful events and proactive management.

For compliance and governance, Avantra supports IT General Controls (ITGCs) through comprehensive audit trails and reporting. Here is where Howdens have seen some real value and time saving by writing many custom checks to perform real time alerting for unapproved access and valuable monthly reporting for senior management. This eliminates the manual effort previously required to demonstrate control effectiveness. Automation has also become a key component of the team's operational strategy. Using Avantra's library of more than 100 pre-built automation workflows, Howdens has eliminated many routine Basis administration tasks. A web dispatcher workflow that previously required approximately 20 minutes of manual effort now completes in just 40 seconds. System upgrades and maintenance activities that once demanded careful coordination can now be executed significantly faster and with greater consistency.

“The language in JavaScript is easy to understand — I don't have to know SAP-specific code.”

— Robert Kennady *SAP Basis Engineer at Howdens*

The platform's JavaScript-based automation framework has lowered traditional SAP scripting barriers, enabling engineers to create and modify workflows without deep SAP-specific coding expertise.

Workflow integrations with the team's ticketing systems and single sign-on capabilities further streamline day-to-day operations.

THE IMPACT

Another Member of the Basis Team

The value of Avantra is perhaps best summarized by the Howdens team itself: “Having Avantra is like having another Basis team member that never sleeps.” said Graeme Cassidy, Database Basis Manager, Howdens. Tasks that previously required between 45 minutes and an hour using Solution Manager can now be completed in as little as 5 to 10 minutes.

Alert volumes have decreased significantly, while alert quality has improved. The team now receives predictive, threshold-driven notifications that are relevant and actionable, dramatically reducing time spent investigating false positives.

The transition to the cloud was completed without any delay in monitoring coverage thanks to Avantra's agentless connectivity model. And as the SAP landscape continues to evolve, operational visibility and automation capabilities scale alongside it. Most importantly, Howdens has been able to expand monitoring coverage, improve compliance, increase automation, and support a growing SAP environment without increasing Basis headcount.

AT A GLANCE



The Challenge

- Manual SAP health checks consuming valuable engineering time
- Operations teams did not have health check visibility of SAP systems
- High alert volumes and false positives from Solution Manager
- Limited operational visibility across a growing hybrid SAP landscape
- Increasing complexity from cloud migration and integrations
- Need to scale SAP operations without adding resources

Benefits with Avantra

- 500+ automated daily checks, alerts, and workflows
- Single-pane-of-glass visibility across the SAP estate
- Predictive monitoring with reduced alert noise
- Faster cloud migration monitoring and operational readiness
- Automated ITGC compliance reporting and audit trails
- Routine Basis tasks reduced from minutes to seconds
- Operational scalability without increasing headcount

Now you're *really* running.

Get started with Avantra and take control of your Cloud ERP journey.

© 2022-08 Syslink Xandria Ltd and its subsidiaries trading as Avantra. All rights reserved. Avantra is a registered trademark of Syslink Xandria Ltd. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. This preliminary information is subject to change without notice and is provided "as is" with no warranty. Syslink Xandria Ltd and its subsidiaries shall not be liable for any direct, indirect, special, incidental or consequential damages in connection with the use of this material. This material is not intended to be a binding agreement.