

COOLSPOLS

By Ariadne Software

From crisis to cakewalk

How a major UK food manufacturer used CoolSpools to connect their AS400 to Office 365 - without the headache of using IBM's SMTP server



Credit: Liverpool Echo

The Client:

J F Renshaw

Renshaw is a British food manufacturing company established in 1898. Based in Liverpool, it prides itself on a largely local workforce, as well as a Royal Warrant from Queen Elizabeth II.



Business Sector:

Food Manufacturing

Renshaw is the leading British manufacturer of icing, marzipan, frostings, caramel and mallows, with customers ranging from specialist sugarcraft shops to food manufacturers, bakery wholesalers and major supermarkets, and a network of distributors spanning 30 countries worldwide. If you buy a pack of ready-to-roll icing from your local supermarket, chances are it'll be Renshaw who made it.

Background

Renshaw's INFOR System21 ERP generates a range of key daily reports, which are distributed via email, both within and outside the company, for urgent action.

The Challenge

With migration to Office 365 at the heart of their new IT strategy, Renshaw planned to replace Lotus Notes with Microsoft Exchange. But there was a problem: without Lotus Notes, they would need to set up another mail server on the AS400 to distribute those vital daily reports via Office 365. And IBM's SMTP engine is highly complex to configure and troubleshoot...

When JF Renshaw, leading British manufacturer of baking and cake decoration products, were planning their migration to Microsoft Office 365 in July 2020, the benefits were obvious...

- flexible working
- alignment with industry standards
- robust security
- cloud storage
- business continuity

...a compellingly long list.

But there was also a problem.

While Office 365 ticked so many important boxes, it also meant the loss of one key feature: the IBM i (AS400) SMTP email server to deliver some critical daily reports.

"We send out a lot of spool files," Shaun Pearson, Business Systems Analyst at Renshaw, explains. "Standard reports from System21, together with the outputs from queries that we've written, and some bespoke reports as well. And they go to lots of people - finance, operations, everybody in the business, basically."

Some of these emails were vital, flagging up potential issues before they became major problems. Internally, issues like frozen stock and suspended accounts sessions demanded immediate action. Externally, integrity of the supply chain was at stake.

Shaun lists a couple of examples. "The big retailers send in their orders via EDI, and we pull them into the ERP system. Now occasionally, we get failures with those - bar codes missing, duplicate orders, things like that. So we have a report that runs around four in the morning, which pinpoints any errors and says,

‘you need to do something about this’. We also transmit orders to a third party logistics company, so they can pick and dispatch them. To avoid potential problems, Customer Service send an email out to make sure they’ve received them onto their system. Again it’s a sort of double-check, really.”



Previously, Lotus Notes had bridged the gap between ERP and email. By acting as an SMTP server, information was extracted from INFOR System21 and distributed via email, with minimum fuss.

So it came as a surprise to find there was an issue replicating this with Office 365. The answer had seemed straightforward enough: reconfigure the IBM AS400 SMTP server to point to Microsoft Exchange.

But delivery of emails from the ERP promptly ground to a halt.

For Shaun Pearson and Renshaw, this was a show-stopper.

He knew that keeping Lotus Notes was not an option. “We were already swimming against the tide. It’s not a system many people are familiar with. It doesn’t integrate that well into the Office applications, and for us there was a costing issue as well. We knew we should be moving to the cloud, so we shouldn’t be hosting servers ourselves. And we’re not a massive IT department, so those were all reasons to go. Then our Lotus Notes expert left the company...”

They had to find another solution. Urgently.

Shaun turned to their support provider, Life IT - specialists in key technologies within the IBM and Microsoft portfolios. Dave Parry, Technical Consultant at Life IT, takes up the story.

“They’d tried to get their System21 to talk to Office 365, but they were having a lot of problems with it. An added issue was the complexity of troubleshooting IBM’s SMTP... it’s a nightmare trying to find out why emails haven’t been sent.”

But Dave had an ace up his sleeve. About six months earlier he had deployed a solution to this very problem for another customer.

““They’d tried to get their System21 to talk to Office 365, but they were having a lot of problems with it. An added issue was the complexity of troubleshooting IBM’s SMTP... it’s a nightmare trying to find out why emails haven’t been sent.””

The CoolSpools email module.

He recommended it to Renshaw without hesitation. “I knew CoolSpools would solve the issue here. I said look, it’s going to be a lot easier if you get this.” What made the solution more compelling was the chance to take advantage of a free 30 day trial. “It was great for them, because they didn’t commit to buying it until I’d proved it worked.”

Dave was in no doubt that they would like what they saw. “The functionality you get - the cost to the product - is just amazing, it really is. I don’t understand why people don’t buy all the modules and start using everything. It’s a really powerful product. And, you know, I always think it’s incredibly cheap.”

“Unlike IBM’s SMTP, the fault logging in the CoolSpools email module is tremendous, because you can just bring up all the emails that have been processed – resend them if need be. If one hasn’t gone you can see why... the email address is no longer valid, they’ve been removed from Office 365, whatever. It’s very easy to track and trace what’s gone on.”



“The functionality you get - the cost to the product - is just amazing, it really is. I don't understand why people don't buy all the modules and start using everything. It's a really powerful product. And, you know, I always think it's incredibly cheap.”

Dave's confidence was well-placed. The trial was a success.

After which, for Shaun Pearson it was an easy decision. “We had to spend a little bit of money - and it really was only a little bit of money - so it was just a no-brainer.” His only real concern was potential upheaval for users - a concern shared by Dave Parry. “The challenge here was to fix a problem that the users weren't even aware of. So the best outcome, really, was that nobody noticed!”

Nobody did.

Dave Parry recalls, “The users had no idea of the complications in the background. That said, the process couldn't have been smoother. I did everything remotely - obviously in July 2020, we weren't going anywhere! We installed the email module and then, with a little help from the techies, created a mailbox on Office 365, which allowed authentication for the AS400. And Bingo! We had it up and running.”

Shaun agrees. “It didn't take long to implement. They set up the main program, said ‘check it out, see if it's working’. It did.

And then we integrated it into our program, just added the entries there. It was very easy, very easy.”

Short and sweet, as they say at Renshaw.

And it's been working smoothly ever since. Dave Parry confirms, “I was just checking this morning to see if any calls for CoolSpools had been logged on the support desk. There were none.”

That's a whole year, with no support issues at all.

Asked what has impressed him most about the CoolSpools implementation, Shaun answers at once: “Just the straightforwardness of it. I wouldn't really change anything. We know where those reports are coming from, so if we do ever have a problem, then we know where to look. But we never have.”

For Shaun Pearson, that really is the icing on the cake.



Credit: Liverpool Echo

Try CoolSpools FREE for 30 days!

The complete collection of CoolSpools software, including Converter, Email, Database and Admin is available free to evaluate.

CoolSpools for IBM i (AS400, iSeries) is an Information Management Solution which converts spool and database files to PDF, Excel and other formats, enabling you to move away from paper-based documents and save time and money by distributing information automatically in electronic formats.

Download the software free for 30 days.

At the end of your trial, you will be able to purchase a license with 12 months maintenance included for free.

Please see our pricing page for more information.

About CoolSpools

CoolSpools automates the sharing of data and documents for employees, customers and suppliers using the IBM i / AS400 platform. It's highly flexible, allowing end-users and ISVs to build seamless integration with both standard and bespoke software.

It's reliable too. Whether for email, intranet or EDI, CoolSpools is precise and robust, converting database and spool files into a range of formats, including:

- PDF
- XML
- HTML
- Text
- Excel
- CSV
- ...and more.

CoolSpools provides the genuine means to go paperless, making internal processes more efficient, increasing productivity and saving time and money. And all that functionality comes at an incredibly low cost.

Many of the world's most trusted brands have been using our software to gain competitive advantage for more than a decade. Our solutions span a diverse set of industries including Finance, Retail, Government, Pharmaceuticals, Manufacturing and Distribution.

CoolSpools' creators are Ariadne Software, a team of IBM i / AS400 specialists with Silver Business Partner status and a combined experience of over 200 years in product development and support. We have more than 900 customers in 50+ countries and are regularly commended by our customers for the quality of our products and customer service.