

Interview with Martin Beier (Gfl) and Dr. Lars Wolter (Consist)

Consulting for Gfl Software Development



Martin Beier – Manager System and Development, Gfl Dr. Lars Wolter – Senior Consultant, Consist

Consist Connect: Mr. Beier, you have taken advantage of Consist's support to introduce a software product line for internal software development at Gfl and you are now in the process of migrating your own projects step by step. What are your goals with this?

Martin Beier: As a production company for the NRAZ/AVN Service Association, we are entirely responsible for the creation and maintenance of all applications and services for accounting according to the SGB V (5th volume of the German Social Security Code that regulates statutory health insurance). This is an extremely complex IT landscape with organic structures that are subject to ever-higher business requirements. At the same time, changes must be

made on an ever-shorter schedule while still maintaining the same high quality. The existing development environment was no longer capable of meeting these requirements, so we had to look around for alternatives, and came to the concept of a software product line (SPL). This involved particularly the structuring and documentation of development processes.

Consist Connect: Why did you select Consist as an IT partner?

Martin Beier: Back in 2005, we had already had some experience with collaboration with Consist. It started with the development of a connector for the telematics infrastructure in the context of introduction of the electronic health card. We found the staff at Consist

to be extremely professional and competent, but also flexible and service-oriented when needed. When we discovered that Consist was already operating a SPL for their own needs, the choice of an IT partner was easy.

Consist Connect: Dr. Wolter, what experience does Consist bring to the table?

Dr. Lars Wolter: We have introduced software product lines and the associated development processes for both our own company Consist as well as for customers. So we have a lot of experience in this area. Our know-how about setting up a standardized development environment as well as Continuous Integration Service systems is especially valuable.

We use our software product line to create individual software solutions for our customers, and we develop our own products with it as well – everything in the form of agile software production. That applies both to initial development as well as to further development and error correction in the context of support and maintenance.

Consist Connect: Please give our readers an overview of the steps taken in the project.

Dr. Lars Wolter: Our task was and is to advise GfI in the introduction of a software product line and to provide operational support. For developers at GfI, the project means changes to their familiar work processes. So we decided together with Mr. Beier to accompany the project using change management. Because the point isn't just to provide the right technology.

Rather, the developer team has to get used to new, changed processes and implement them in their day-to-day work. That succeeded over the course of the project, in our view largely because of the fascinating new technology, which simply convinces you.

Consist Connect: Mr. Beier, how are the concrete tasks and work processes of your developer team changed by the software product line?

Martin Beier: First, the developers have to master new technologies. That includes a modified IDE, a new code repository, the new build management system, and a central program archive. Second, they have to learn entirely new procedures for software development. For example, the building of the program no longer takes place locally on the developer's own computer, but

centrally on the build system. That makes the process transparent and traceable. Changes are also tested immediately for effects on other software components, so compatibility problems are eliminated before they have a chance to impact operations.

Consist Connect: What led to the high level of acceptance of the work processes on the part of your team?

Martin Beier: The employees were naturally very skeptical at first about changing processes they had developed over years. But since the advantages of the new system were clear to see, those opinions changed quickly; particularly in view of the capabilities of the new system such as automatic testing, automatic code analysis, and so on. These methods offer entirely new options for improving software quality.

About GfI



GfI Gesellschaft für Informations- und Datenverarbeitung mbH, under whose umbrella all the business activities of the two pharmacy computer centers Norddeutsches Apotheken-Rechenzentrum e.V. (NARZ) and AVN Apotheken-Verrechnungsstelle Dr. Carl Carstens GmbH & Co. KG are coordinated, was founded in 1998. Over the years, GfI has developed into a comprehen-

sive information center providing pharmacists, associations, and unions with extensive information and data evaluations that they can use for their commercial and political activities. These particularly include solutions for resource management and general management in and of pharmacies. An interest in PRISMA Datensysteme provides pharmacies with an enterprise resource management system.

High technical standards, the latest in high-performance scanner technology, and reliable IT and data security are all characteristics of the Bremen company. As a service provider for NARZ, the market leader in the northern German states and for AVN, the second largest pharmacy computer center in North Rhine-Westphalia, GfI employs 200 people.

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Consist Connect: What benefits does GfI anticipate with this project, and how were its goals achieved?

Martin Beier: Documented and tested processes simplify software development to an incredible extent, permitting the integration of new or external developers without long familiarization periods. A particular focus was of course the efficient creation of programs and their quality. Although we're still in the project phase, we have already had some successes among projects that have been migrated.

Consist Connect: How satisfied are you overall with the consulting and implementation support provided by Consist?

Martin Beier: Consist relieved us of a great deal of work by handling the project management. We have experienced, competent staff available for design and implementation who provide us with real support for problems that arise in practice. The necessary knowledge transfer can take place in individual discussions or shared workshops as needed, so we can bring our project requirements into alignment with our day-to-day work in a flexible manner. The documents provided have become guidelines for our development operations, and with the support of Consist, we have already converted some complex software projects to the SPL.

Consist Connect: Thank you, Mr. Beier and Dr. Wolter, for the interview.

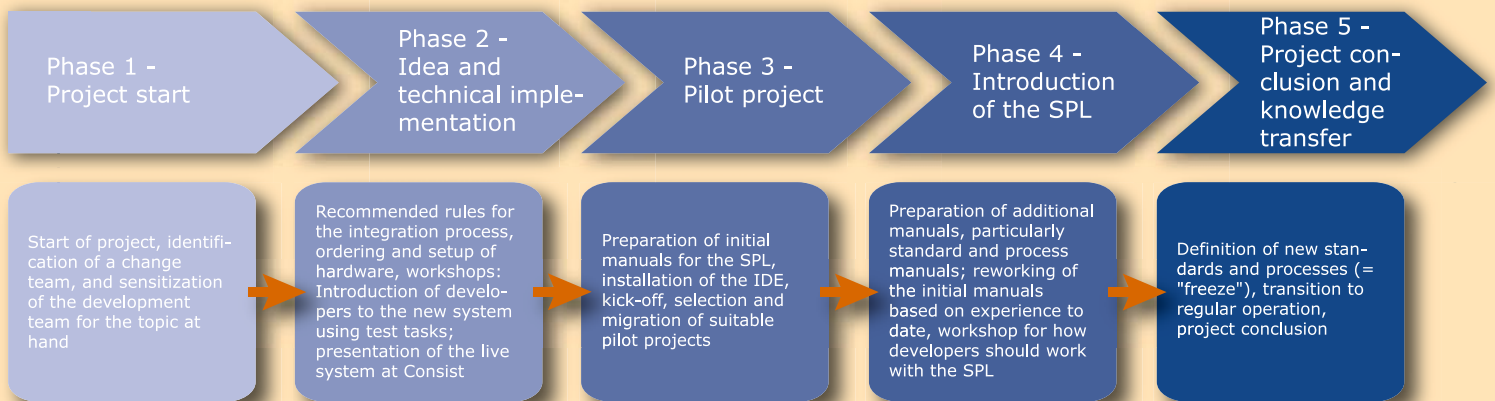
Isabel Braun conducted the interview.

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Procedure for the project plan for the introduction of a software product line (SPL)



graphic: Consist

The management of GfI could and can be informed about the project procedure at the end of each phase, and make interventions at that juncture. The project is currently in Phase 4.