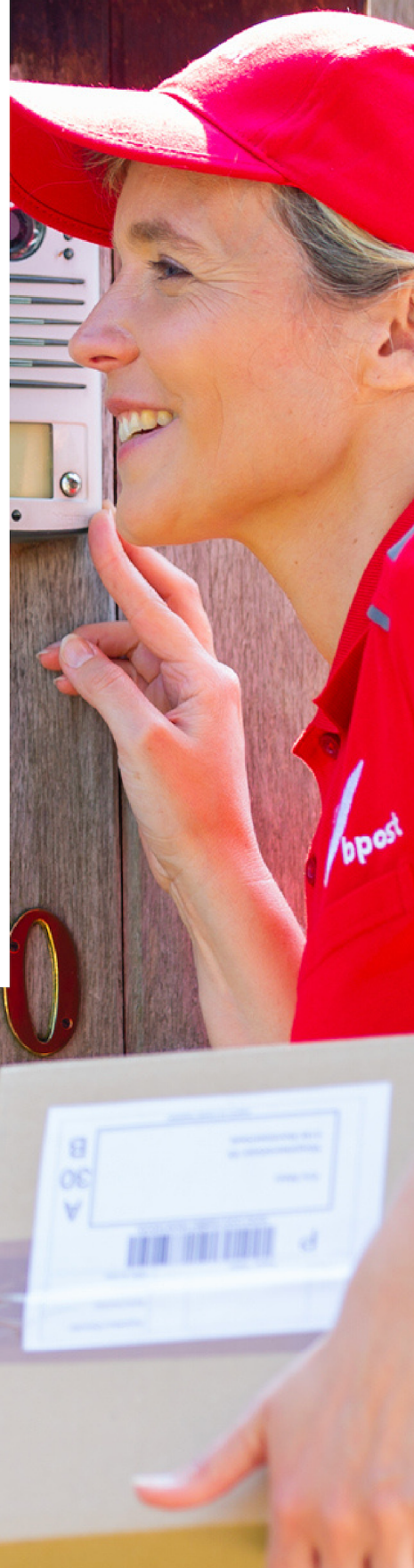




REFERENCE CASE



M2Q Antwerp
Veldkant 33a
BE - 2550 Kontich

M2Q Kortrijk
Nijverheidskaai 3
BE - 8500 Kortrijk

E: info@m2q.be
T: +32 3 451 36 60

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M²Q
Test. Check. Go!

BPostgroup Belgium's leading postal operator

BPostgroup is Belgium's leading postal operator and a growing parcel & omni-commerce logistics partner in Europe, North America and Asia. The 36,000 employees in Belgium and across the globe connect consumers, businesses, and government, by delivering mail and parcels to millions of doorsteps and providing e-commerce logistics services.

Connections and transactions



BPost takes care of connections and transactions in an evolving physical and digital world. They build on their knowledge of society, customers and technologies, and create sustainable value for our worldwide customers and shareholders.

BPost is a global group headquartered in Belgium, comprising various entities around the world, each with their own strengths and services. As a national postal operator, BPost's history is closely intertwined with the history of Belgium. In recent years they have transformed themselves from a traditional postal company into a global parcels and e-commerce logistics provider.



Recently

In the recent years, BPost did a number of acquisitions always with the objective to become a global e-commerce logistics provider. For example, with the acquisition of US company Radial, bpostgroup takes a big step in its transformation into a global e-commerce logistics provider.

Note – bpost bank is not an entity of BPost Group. BPost bank has been established in 1995 under the name "Bank van De Post". It is an independent Belgian bank which relies on a unique partnership model. The bank is owned by BNP Paribas Fortis and is managed by an independent board of directors.



Our role

For this specific assignment, one person was required to assist and support release management to transform to the next level. Our high-level responsibilities within BPost IT are primarily:

- Improve the AS-IS process.
- Create the TO-BE process.
- Set-up a release calendar with major and minor releases.
- Go/No Go process management.

Our release manager is part of a Release Management team consisting of 6 people including 2 people who maintain and evolve the in-house created build & development pipeline.

The release management tasks consist of

- Simplify the AS-IS release management process by removing not necessary admin and not value-added steps (e.g., remove Change Control Board)
- Create the TO-BE process which is better aligned with the Agile working, and the desire to be able to deploy on a daily basis.
- Implement the release management TO-BE process in ServiceNow. The technical implementation is done by InfoSys which required a close cooperation between Infosys and the BPost release manager.
- Create a 18 month rolling release calendar which contained the major releases and placeholders for minor deployments and patches. The major releases had to be coordinated with external parties like BPost Bank and suppliers of packaged solutions.
- Manage the Go/No Go decision process by ensuring decisions are based on measurable and objective criteria. For example, no critical defects are still open, or go is received from the business to deploy.



Environment

BPost has a release management team that is external to the delivery teams, which reports to one of the CIO's of IT. All software releases (in-house and package software) require an approval of release management.

Software is delivered by the various delivery teams (10 teams). The technology is mainly Java and .NET. Each team has a release coordinator who does the actual deployment for example to production.

The eco-system of BPost is a combination of in-house development, software packages, and customized commercial solutions. All this software is integrated and supports the BPost end-to-end processes.

The users are based across the headquarters and the field.

The challenge existed out of multiple points:

- Administrative Burden – A lot of administrative steps were part of the release management process which added no value to the release and deployment itself. For example, a change control board that managed changes to the project scope was part of the release process.



CHALLENGES

- Focus on Major Releases – The release process was focused on major release and did not cater for smaller releases and fixes. This meant that the same criteria were applicable regardless of the size of the project.
- Added Value of Release Management – due to the administrative burden, the release process and deployment was considered as a necessary evil. Furthermore, it was considered as purely an administrative task.
- Adherence to the process – due to the heaviness of the process, the teams used every possibility to circumvent the process. The consequence was that software was deployed in production without anybody knowing this. Fortunately, it only caused occasionally outages.
- Release moments without focused approach – release moments were often planned and undertaken without a specific focus. For example, no deployment plan available that helped understanding the impact of deviations during the deploy. Another example, no backup people available in case something happens to the person responsible for the deployment.
- Build & Deployment Pipeline – the focus was on Java applications whilst BPost has also many applications that were developed in .NET. This resulted in different approaches of deployment depending on the development language. Furthermore, not all aspects of a deployment were part of the pipeline like data migration.

CHALLENGES



OUR SOLUTIONS

Our solutions were specifically adapted to the needs and environment of BPost. A lot of smaller improvements were done but always with the focus to address the challenges mentioned before.

- Administrative Burden – the AS-IS process was analysed and a walkthrough was performed to identify waist and wait time. For each identification, a check was done if there was an added value for the release, and, in case it was not, it was removed. The design of the TO-BE process started from a clean slate and started from an optimal release process. This was adapted to the specific needs of BPost.
- Focus on Major Releases – we retained what was working i.e., planning of quarterly releases, and, initially, added moments for additional deployments. Once the new release process was in place, smaller releases and fixes could be deployed whenever ready, if they comply with the requested criteria.
- Added Value of Release Management – this challenge was addressed by a number of solutions. First, a lighter release and deployment process. Second, reduce the administrative tasks to a minimum, and automate what can be automated. Third, create transparency in what has been released by creating release notes. These release notes are dynamic which means that changes in scope are automatically reflected in the release notes. Fourth, assist the teams during the deployments with coordination and communication.

In case of issues, take care of the escalation and set-up a war room. Finally, allow full automatic deployments via the build deployment pipeline done by the teams in productions, and no longer via a separate team.

- Adherence to the process – the solutions in the previous points were used to improve the adherence to the process. In addition, the use and adherence were more strictly monitored, and the teams were contacted in case of no adherence. Additionally, no compliance to the deploy criteria resulted in a No Go.
- Release moments without focused approach – each release and deployment had a resourced deployment plan with a backup for the most important activities. In case of a major release, an overall plan and communication plan was created and managed during the deployment.
- Build & Deployment Pipeline (BDP) – gathered requirements to improve the build & deployment pipeline. Some examples are allow .NET applications to be deployed via the BDP; integrate data migrations in the BDP; improved monitoring and logging; etc...

The challenges were addressed as explained above. However, there were a number of additional actions were taken to streamline the release and deployment process and make this process more efficient and effective.

Function switches were introduced to allow deployment of software without the dependent teams are ready. When all teams are ready and all software was deployed, the software was released to the users of the application.

The physical CAB was replaced by a virtual CAB avoiding long sessions. Only in case of specific challenges or issues, the physical CAB was organized and only with the teams involved. It also shortened the time a CAB took compared to before. This was highly appreciated by the teams.

The release management team supported the releases and deployments more actively. Some examples are looking for solutions to allow a deployment; better alignment with external parties, set-up war rooms and involve the necessary parties in case issues occur during deployment;

flexibility on the deploy moment; clear communication also in case of No Go, etc....

The TO-BE process was completely introduced with the installation of ServiceNow (replaces HP ALM). We ensured that deployments and the request to allow a deployment, could be done swiftly, with the necessary flexibility, and minimal administration. This required to change the standard set-up and to remove a number of 'authorisations' that added no value.

Key was also to relaunch the process and demonstrate the added value it gives. It was also key to gather suggestions for improvements and communicate back what has been done with the suggestions.

The result of all the improvements undertaken was that the possibility has been created to release daily. The teams used actively this opportunity. Additionally, this reduced the size of the major deployments as smaller deploys were done outside that window.

We also introduced pre- and post-deployments for releases so the actual deployment could be reduced in time but also a reduction in weekend and evening working.

Methods and Techniques

- Agile based principles
- Process analysis (5 why's, Ishikawa aka Fishbone, process walkthrough, ...)
- Communication plan
- Standard deployment plan
- Separate release from deployment

