



MICROSOFT DYNAMICS SUCCESS CASE

DELIVERING EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE AND A QUALITY PRODUCT NATIONWIDE

How a UK-wide catering butchers adopted Microsoft Dynamics AX to match their 24/7 business model and went on to help shape Microsoft's product development.

Fairfax Meadow is the UK's largest national catering butcher with a very robust reputation in the food service industry. The 40 year-old, Derby based company is part of Argent Group Europe, the holding company for several food businesses. Blending advanced manufacturing techniques with the skills of the traditional butcher Fairfax Meadow aims to deliver high quality meat at a very competitive price.

The company's customers include many prestigious blue chip names from the hotel, pub, restaurant and travel sectors. Offering the most flexible product ranges as well as making the order processing and delivery as efficient and effective as possible is paramount.

CHALLENGE

The main reason to consider replacing the company's ERP system, says Tony Carlisle, Fairfax Meadow's IT manager, was that the legacy system had become obsolete and he was concerned about its long term viability. The catering market had changed in the last 10 years, he adds, from a market where only about 10% of orders were received by EDI to one where, frequently, over 50% of orders are received electronically. In June 2007 the company chose a new ERP system. The first big decision was to decide on the best application and reseller.

Fairfax Meadow had two main criteria based on their

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Tracey Gardener, Account Manager, Fairfax Meadow



fairfaxmeadow
putting great meat on the menu

Client: Fairfax Meadow

Web: www.fairfaxmeadow.co.uk

Number of employees: 500

Country: UK

Industry: Catering Butcher

CUSTOMER PROFILE

This UK's largest national catering butcher wanted to streamline its operations in order to deliver improved customer service and the finest quality meat.

SOFTWARE AND SERVICES

Microsoft Dynamics AX

Implementation & Project Management

Business Process Analysis

Microsoft Technology Adoption Programme

previous ERP platform. Firstly it wanted a generic solution that would allow them to diversify the way they used IT systems within their business.

Secondly it wanted to harness the benefits by aligning to a global solution and supplier which were appropriate to their type of company.

SOLUTION

Fairfax Meadow carried out a detailed analysis of its requirements with Columbus, a Microsoft Dynamics AX partner, who helped it identify the functions available in the Microsoft Dynamics AX platform that matched these needs. Columbus has worked with Microsoft Dynamics AX as a reseller since 1998 and had very broad experience in the food industry. In June 2007, Fairfax Meadow selected Microsoft Dynamics AX and appointed Columbus as its Microsoft Dynamics AX partner to implement and customise the new ERP solution from the ground up.

“The multi-tier structure of Microsoft Dynamics AX and the ease with which changes could be made best suited our environment,” says Tony Carlisle. “The product seemed very robust. The tiered structure allowed us the ability to take our own changes and those from Microsoft and our reseller and be certain that they could work together.”

Microsoft Dynamics AX is an ERP solution developed specifically for mid-size and larger organisations that has a similar Windows template to all Microsoft software. It has a tiered architecture that allows different levels of functionality to be added and maintained on top of the core



Microsoft Dynamics AX capabilities.

Mary Hunter, managing director of Columbus, says: "Columbus has a strategic focus on the manufacturing sector. We have worked with numerous customers that are similar to Fairfax Meadow which enabled us to quickly understand their business needs."

Carlisle describes the set-up of the project team. "Three of my IT staff were allocated to support me. In addition we asked five team leaders in the business to work about 30 hours a week on the project. These team leaders were supported by their staff, which meant we had a heavy business involvement in the project from the beginning."

The Columbus team supporting Fairfax Meadow comprised a project manager supported by five consultants and a set of programmers to do the necessary coding for the additional requirements. The Columbus consultants split the business in two, one group looking after finance and sales, and the other the rest of the manufacturing business. The deep analysis of Microsoft Dynamics AX's functions and the company's requirements really paid off – Fairfax Meadow got exactly what they needed.

The major integration piece of work that had to be done was to integrate Fairfax Meadow's weigh labelling system that they use to label their products on the shop floor with the necessary modules and programmes in Microsoft Dynamics AX.

Working closely with Columbus, Fairfax Meadow has

since gone on to be involved with critical aspects of the development of the new version of Microsoft's flagship ERP system - Microsoft Dynamics AX 2012.

An invitation to Microsoft's prestigious Technology Adoption Programme (TAP) offered Fairfax Meadow early access to features of Dynamics AX 2012 for testing and evaluation purposes, explains Tony Carlisle. It was an invitation, he adds, that the company was quick to accept.

Back in 2007, he relates, "We had made a huge jump going from our previous system to Microsoft Dynamics AX 4. And the move to Microsoft Dynamics AX 2012 could deliver another powerful step change to our performance - so we were delighted to be asked to help make the product as good as it is. The opportunity to talk to the actual developers was invaluable, and gave us an enormous insight into how to best leverage Microsoft Dynamics AX 2012 for competitive advantage."

What's more, it was also an invitation built on a bedrock of solid relationships and mutual respect, explains Carlisle. "Microsoft don't invite a lot of customers into their TAP scheme," he observes. "But we have a very good relationship with Columbus, and they in turn have a very good relationship with Microsoft, and the proposition made a lot of sense to all concerned. And potentially, it would see our own specific operational needs reflected in the standard package."

For Fairfax, it turns out, does indeed face some distinctive manufacturing challenges. The issue, explains Carlisle, is

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twofold. First, Fairfax's IT systems must be able to cope with a concept known as 'reverse bills of material'.

Unlike a conventional bill of material, which is a list of parts and components that go to build up a finished product, Fairfax's production lines start with joints of meat which are subsequently disassembled into individual products – steaks, for example, as well as secondary products such as mince and diced beef. Second, the business sells to its customers in two separate units of measure, simultaneously. So the company's IT systems need to capture and work with these two distinct units of measure, at every critical point in the manufacturing process.

"Basically, a customer might order a number of steaks, or pieces of topside, or turkeys for the carvery, and we would supply the number required, but charge the customer by weight," explains Carlisle. "So we need to be able to track the weight of the products we produce, as well as the quantities of them."

BENEFITS

Darren Dougherty, Fairfax Meadow's operations planning manager, says: "Microsoft Dynamics AX has given us tighter control on the shop floor. We are able to collect information in realtime. This means when a customer asks a query, we can answer him not only quickly but with up-

to-the minute information.

Tracey Gardener, Fairfax Meadow's national account controller, adds: "Microsoft Dynamics AX in conjunction with EDI input has for some customers shortened the time to input sales orders by anything up to five hours! The telesales operators have found that they can get all the information from the system that they need to process and order or answer a customer query. Microsoft Dynamics AX has reduced the amount of time that we need to spend on sales administration, which gives us more time to sell."

Columbus' Hunter concludes: "Much of the success of the project was down to the close working relationship between the two organisations, the dedication of the project teams and steering support from both companies. Fairfax Meadow had clear objectives specifically around customer service, operational efficiency, business intelligence and collaboration. We achieved these goals by following our structured implementation methodology."

By implementing a modern ERP solution Fairfax Meadow has been able to respond to their own objectives to provide exceptional customer services and quality of product. They have achieved this by immersing the business in the implementation and in the careful preparation and full understanding of their requirements.

Partners:



ABOUT COLUMBUS:

Columbus currently employs over 1,000 dedicated professionals working out of 41 offices in 21 countries. With more than 20 years experience and 6,000 successful business cases, Microsoft recognises Columbus as a top global partner and has presented the company with virtually every award and certification available.

