

Mingara

Recreation Club Gets Serious About Business

From its beginnings on the NSW central coast in 1971, Mingara Recreation Club Limited has grown to become a \$100 million enterprise. Its aim is to encourage, foster and promote sports, games and recreation activities, and to assist in the provision of playing, training, coaching and teaching facilities.

The organisation boasts almost 50,000 members and these days its facilities include a multi-million dollar gymnasium and fitness centre next door to its state-of-the-art licensed club premises, and a regional athletics centre. Amalgamations have also seen Mingara add two new clubs to its stable – one in Sydney and another on the NSW mid north coast.

Problems

Typically, licensed clubs rely on a wide range of specialised software applications covering everything from gaming to restaurant management, human resources considerations through to finance. Individually, these applications hold a great deal of data about every aspect of the business. The problem is that few of them “talk” to one another. The information derived for each area remains locked in its own application silo.

At Mingara this meant that a great deal of manual work was required whenever management reports needed to be produced. Data had to be exported from each system, consolidated and de-duplicated before any reports could be generated. Monthly reporting took weeks while ad hoc reporting usually required assistance from the owner of whichever particular system was involved. If that owner happened to be on leave, the report would have to wait until their return.

Mingara Management Accountant, John Byrne, explains, “We couldn’t get the information we needed and we weren’t using any of the data to intelligently improve our business.” For a business that is highly susceptible to changing consumer spending patterns, Mingara’s reporting delays were unacceptable and in 2008, club management decided it was time to take charge of the data within its systems.

At a glance

Business Objective:

To create a centralised source of clean, accurate data for better business intelligence (BI) and management reporting.

Solution:

- Microsoft SQL Server Business Intelligence Services
- Microsoft Windows SharePoint Services 3.0
- Microsoft Office
- Microsoft Dynamics GP
- Microsoft Dynamics Analysis Cubes for Excel
- Scribe Insight Integration

Business Benefits:

- Significant reduction of manual effort required to integrate data from disparate sources and produce reports.
- Consistent reporting approach across the organisation.
- Consolidated view of all business critical information.
- Immediate insight into business performance.
- A new ability to innovate leading to better customer services.



Solution

Byrne says, "We defined a three year program; in the first we would begin by integrating our systems. In the second year we planned to concentrate on business intelligence (BI), building a data warehouse using the data from all our systems to create a new reporting environment. In the third year we would look for ways to mobilise this data to improve the business."

Integration of Mingara's systems and its general ledger was carried out in 2008 using the software tool, Scribe Insight Integration.

When it came time to consider the BI solution, the club selected Microsoft SQL Server Business Intelligence Services. Not only did it offer a good fit for Mingara's environment but the choice of a Microsoft solution ensured there would be no problems integrating with the club's financial system, Microsoft Dynamics GP. In addition it provided a means of leveraging the organisation's existing investment in licences for products including Microsoft SQL Server, Windows Server and desktop applications.

To deploy the software and help build the solution Byrne decided to replace Mingara's previous IT supplier with a new implementation partner – Professional Advantage. "The IT company that we previously worked with weren't doing the job and it was time to look at new options. We knew that whoever we chose had to be sizable because we wanted a long term relationship with a professional support structure in place. Professional Advantage stood out because they had a gold partnership with Microsoft, they talked the right language and they came back with the best proposal."

Throughout 2009, Professional Advantage and Mingara set about designing and building the new BI environment. The data warehouse was readied and populated with data from Mingara's disparate systems. Reports were designed and a portal developed allowing instant access for authorised personnel to view, drill down and query data via the web. Microsoft Excel access was added for those users who required more than standard reports or who preferred to review their information by spreadsheet.

Benefits

By the end of the year Mingara's reporting practices had changed completely. The effect, according to Byrne, is "amazing". In some instances reporting time has been reduced by up to six weeks. Resources have been freed up and redeployed, and the new environment is changing the way people work.

"We used to have a resource responsible for running P&L [profit and loss] reports and distributing them to management," Byrne notes. "It was a time consuming task but it no longer exists. The reports are always there on the web with live information. It's given us the right information to make the right decision at the right time."

Mingara's gaming system provides another example. Historically gaming information was manually downloaded and collated by administration staff, before being put into spreadsheets and distributed to management. The process was prone to delays and periodic inaccuracies. With the new reporting system however, staff time has been freed up and the data has moved to the web environment where it can be accessed and analysed instantly.

Across the organisation, access to data is easing day-to-day management. Events data is displayed live, allowing staff to easily identify the events being staged on the club premises, the timing and catering requirements of each event, whether the event has been paid in full and key contact details relating to the booking.

The new analysis capabilities can be used to examine historical sales and stock holding trends to identify optimal stock levels for the restaurants and bars. Almost every area of Mingara is discovering new information and new ways of achieving efficiencies.



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Future

Despite the gains to date, Byrne is most excited about 2010 and the final phase of Mingara's three year plan. "Right now we are definitely achieving but in the coming year we'll be talking about substantial amounts of money being saved and made. This is the year when we put it all into action. When we shift from blanket marketing to target marketing of our members," he says.

"Using the BI system, we can query across all our systems and identify member transactions on our gaming system, in our bars or restaurants at the gym or anywhere where we take a swipe of a members card," Byrne explains. Armed with this information, Mingara will begin to develop highly targeted – almost personalised - services and marketing campaigns to meet member needs.

Given the competitive nature of the club industry, Byrne is loathe to give too much away about the mechanics of the campaigns prior to launch, but he mentions activities such as member profiling and marketing activities utilising automatic alerts noting changed behavior.

BI will also be used to help identify the spin-off trade from concerts on club premises. "We'll swipe members cards and track whether they have drinks, play machines or

have dinner," Byrne says. "We'll find out the real return from concert attendance." Similar plans are afoot to determine the level of interaction gym visitors have with the club. "It all helps in making decisions. For example, is it a prudent investment to construct a gym at another club location." Byrne adds.

"Mingara is in a growth phase and is constantly looking for acquisitions," Byrne comments. "Therefore we needed an engine – a back end system – that would work well to provide us with the right synergies from having multiple clubs. That's what the last three years has been about and now we are positioned for the future."

As Mingara's BI vision evolves, Professional Advantage continues to provide advice and support that is helping to turn that vision into a reality. Most importantly, the relationship between the two organisations remains as close as ever. "The Professional Advantage help desk team is highly competent. It's a really professional outfit and from an account management point of view, Professional Advantage has provided us with exceptional service." Byrne concludes.

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