



Microsoft Customer Solution

Case study

Microsoft® Business Solutions–Great Plains® Kicks Goals for AFL

“As well as saving us time, it improves accuracy and has allowed us to capture and provide better information.”

Mr Bill Tsiakos.
Finance Manager
AFL



The Australian Football League has implemented Microsoft® Business Solutions–Great Plains® to improve functionality, stability and professional support and to facilitate the expansion of financial services to its interstate operations. AFL Finance Manager, Mr Bill Tsiakos, said since upgrading its business solution to Microsoft Great Plains, the AFL had largely automated its process of inputting match day receipts and returning net profits to home clubs. “We have games throughout Australia and part of our distribution policy is for the home club to keep the gate takings less venue costs, but we were processing those manually,” Mr Tsiakos said.

“In the past we have keyed information into a spreadsheet, printed out a journal and manually re-keyed it into the system. For 176 games a year plus finals, it was really time consuming.”

With Microsoft Great Plains the spreadsheet is automatically uploaded which alleviates the multiple handling of data which Mr Tsiakos said saved the AFL an average of one full day every month and completing the BAS was down to half an hour. “As well as saving us time, it improves accuracy and has allowed us to capture and provide better information,” he said.

CUSTOMER PROFILE	BUSINESS SITUATION	SOLUTION	BENEFITS
The Australian Football League is based at Docklands in Melbourne and undertakes the financial operations of the professional AFL competition in Victoria, New South Wales and soon Northern Territory. AFL is one of the largest sectors in Australia’s sport and recreation industry. The game is Australia’s premier spectator sport attracting more than 14 million people to watch all levels of the game across all communities. It has an annual turnover of between \$150 million and \$200 million.	The AFL needed to automate its processing of match-day receipts and to facilitate the expansion of its financial services to its interstate operations.	Microsoft® Business Solutions–Great Plains® is an affordable scaleable solution that provides functionality for financials, analysis and reporting, project management, inventory and order processing and e-commerce.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamlines business processes Dramatically improves data integrity Providing timely, accurate data across the entire operation Effective report generation

Situation

“We wanted to come up to date with the latest technology, get Fixed Assets on board and put in a system which would enable us to grow our financial services,”

Mr Bill Tsiakos
Finance Manager
AFL

Previously the AFL had been relying on an outdated financial management system which had not been adapted to the organisation since it was implemented in the early '90s.

“We were using a very old system based on '80s technology that was really tailored for a manufacturing environment rather than an operation like ours,” Mr Tsiakos said.

“It was slow and frustrating and the reporting wasn't up to scratch. It didn't integrate well with other applications like Excel – it was still printing out on old A3 paper, there was a lot of downtime and it was well past its use-by date.”

Microsoft Great Plains is an affordable scalable solution that provides functionality for financials, analysis and reporting, project management, inventory and order processing and e-commerce.

“We wanted to come up to date with the latest technology, get Fixed Assets on board and put in a system which

would enable us to grow our financial services,” Mr Tsiakos said.

The AFL has a number of state bodies and currently does accounting for AFL and Football Victoria which is made up of three entities: Victorian Country Football League, Victorian Football League and Victorian Football Development Foundation.

The sport in NSW, QLD and NT operates as a subsidiary of AFL. Operations in SA, WA, Victoria and Tasmania are independent.

“We wanted to be able to take this solution and apply it to other state bodies outside Victoria” Mr Tsiakos said.

“We are assessing the viability of providing a shared services approach to the football industry and Microsoft Great Plains stood out as the ideal platform to allow us to do that.”

The NSW operation went live with Microsoft Great Plains in July 2003 and planning for the NT implementation is currently underway.



Mr Bill Tsiakos,
AFL Finance Manager

Solution

Mr Tsiakos said AFL had undertaken an extensive evaluation process before selecting Microsoft Great Plains and Professional Advantage, a Microsoft Business Solutions Gold Certified Partner.

“Five vendors responded to our request for tender and we prepared an extensive and exhaustive script of our real data so they demonstrated their system with our data,” he said.

“It’s all well and good if a vendor shows you samples of data from test companies but if the data doesn’t relate to your business you can’t really get a feel for how it will fit – Great Plains was outstanding.”

Mr Paul Orfanos of Professional Advantage said his company was very pleased to be working with the AFL.

“The AFL is such a high profile Australian organisation and they went through a rigorous evaluation process of both product and partners to make sure they chose the ideal combination that could provide a solution for their needs,” he said.

The AFL’s next step in its Microsoft Great Plains project is to extend its use of Microsoft® Business Solutions for Analytics–FRx® on the web.

“Our reporting out of FRx has been first rate and well received by department managers, to whom we still deliver that via hard copy, so we’re going to look at using the web to facilitate delivery of those reports,” Mr Tsiakos said.

Flemming Beisner, Business Group Director, Microsoft Business Solutions Australasia, said the AFL’s use of Microsoft Great Plains showcased its flexibility.

“Microsoft Great Plains is making sure the AFL has no growing pains in expanding its interstate operations and this attests to the product’s scalability and flexibility,” Mr Beisner said.

“The AFL now has the advantage of greater reporting capability and advanced forecasting for effective budget management.”

Benefits

The AFL now has greater visibility across its financial systems and has achieved significant improvements in processing match-day returns. The upgrade to Microsoft Great Plains has enabled the AFL to pursue its goals of expanding its financial services to its interstate operations.

Mr Paul Orfanos, of Professional Advantage, said the AFL wanted to bring its financial processes up to date for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

“They wanted to get up to speed with the latest technology and with Microsoft Great Plains and Professional Advantage they are now able to capture all their financial information in a way they were unable to do with their previous system,” he said.

“Microsoft Great Plains is making sure the AFL has no growing pains in expanding its interstate operations and this attests to the product’s scalability and flexibility.”

Mr Flemming Beisner

Business Group Director

Microsoft Business Solutions Australasia

Greater Visibility Across Financial Operations

The AFL has an improved reporting capability and accelerated forecasting to aid in effective budget management.

Mr Bill Tsiakos said his organisation was using Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, General Ledger, Bank Reconciliation, Fixed Assets, FRX and Integration Manager.

“Our processes were quite manual where if tickets or corporate hospitality were sold the details would be provided to us and we would re-key it into the system whereas now we’ve got templates which we upload to Integration Manager and it comes straight into our business process to eliminate paperwork,” he said

Streamlined Financial Processes to Facilitate Expansion

Since the Microsoft Great Plains implementation the AFL is making efficiency gains with speedier BAS reporting and advanced reporting and analytical capability.

Mr Orfarnos, from Professional Advantage, said the organisation had expanded significantly, taking on NSW and soon bringing NT on-line. “They couldn’t achieve that as effectively without such a scalable business solution to streamline their processes because everyone is on the same system,” he said.

In-House Training

The AFL did much of its training in-house following the Microsoft Great Plains implementation and experienced few problems in transition.

“There were a few things our staff had to adapt to – for instance Microsoft Great Plains captures information at the front end and requires you to input data for BAS differently to our old system, so it’s got a few extra requirements up front,” Mr Tsiakos said.

“Data entry is slightly more intensive in the accounts payable area but the discipline is there so that if you capture information correctly the first time it streamlines back end processes.”



AFL staff in the merchandise store

Software and Services

Software

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Microsoft Business Solutions' Partner – Professional Advantage

Professional Advantage was established in 1989 and today employs around 200 people in Sydney, Melbourne and Fargo, USA. The company is the largest provider of leading brand global financial management and ERP systems to midsize organisations in Australia, supporting over 600 clients nationally. Professional Advantage also supplies CRM, eBusiness, retail and business intelligence solutions to the mid market. Their multi product offering is complemented by its development, systems integration, consulting, training, and support services.

AFL staff in the
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For More Information

For more information in Australia, call the Microsoft Information Centre on 13 20 58.

To access information using the World Wide Web, go to:

<http://www.microsoft.com/australia/business/mbconnect/>

For more information about Professional Advantage services visit the Web site at: <http://www.pa.com.au/>

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