

ClubLINKS

Club Management Service Discovers a Professional Advantage with Integrated Microsoft Solution

ClubLINKS was established in 2002 with the aim of providing accounting and financial support services to two PGA LINKS clubs, Sandhurst and Sanctuary Lakes. Since then it has expanded both its range of managed services and the number of properties it works with, to create a portfolio that includes outsourced accounting, payroll and IT functions; concierge services; private security, utilities management and an architectural review committee to ensure consistency and appropriateness in residential properties.

Problems

As ClubLINKS' business model evolved, different software packages were introduced to support new services, but according to Chief Operating Officer, Nick Hanvin, the additions followed no particular plan.

The result was that by 2004, ClubLINKS found itself dealing with many different systems that were unable to share basic data. Hanvin explains, "The main problem was with our finance and point of sale (POS) system which was written in a very old computer language. It was not user friendly which made it difficult to interrogate the data, so we had to engage external consultants every time we wanted to write a new report."

With the system only designed to handle two of the company's growing stable of services, no ability to integrate with common tools such as Microsoft Excel, and increasing stability and performance issues, the problems soon came to a head. Hanvin went to the Board and recommended it was time to develop a new approach to IT.

Solution

ClubLINKS began by examining the functionality of international golf management software packages and then applying this knowledge to help define its own needs.

High on the list of requirements was a single database to house all customer data. In addition, ClubLINKS wanted the ability to replicate each club's individual set of business rules within the CRM. Hanvin notes, "We had a scenario where one person could be in up to

At a glance

Business Objective

Replacement of multiple disparate systems with a single integrated technology solution capable of spanning all ClubLINKS' operations and properties, with particular emphasis on support for financial management, customer relationship management and retail management activities.

Solution

Microsoft Dynamics CRM and c360
Microsoft Dynamics GP
Microsoft Dynamics Retail Management System
Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007
Microsoft SQL Server Reporting Services
Scribe integration software
Storage Area Network
Citrix Thin Client

Business Benefits

- Savings of \$150,000 annually over previous IT consulting fees
- Savings of \$60,000 annually over previous IT support fees
- Customers are represented once in the CRM system, removing duplication of data and effort
- Financial data has been centralised and reporting has been made easier.



five different systems and this raised issues for maintaining accuracy of data. We wanted to be able to add a member to the CRM system once and have that information made available to all the relevant business applications.”

Other items on the wish list included centralised IT administration, improved data security, better communication with staff and clients including a member’s portal, improved access to quality management data and a platform that would support ClubLINKS continuing growth.

Although Hanvin found one overseas-based solution that came close to meeting ClubLINKS needs, his final choice was to replace all existing software applications with a suite of Microsoft products including the Microsoft Dynamics GP, CRM and Retail Management Solutions, plus Microsoft SharePoint Server.

“We went with Microsoft because, through Professional Advantage, they have a local presence and we were very comfortable working with the PA people. Microsoft is an industry leader and we were confident that their products would evolve to incorporate new technologies and functionality.” Hanvin says.

Implementation

ClubLINKS took a holistic approach to implementation and required a thorough project study to ensure they achieve their goals.

For the next twelve months a project team of ClubLINKS and Professional Advantage staff scoped the solution. “The scope changed significantly as we understood the capabilities better and the brief expanded”, says Hanvin. By November 2006, the requirements were documented and the team was ready to start.

With so much to do, deployment of the new solution was divided into two phases. The first involved the introduction of centralised servers and implementation of a Citrix thin client server environment for application delivery. Phase two called for the replacement of existing application software with the Microsoft suite.

Within a year ClubLINKS had integrated its new applications to create a single, enterprise wide solution that provides comprehensive information on every aspect of its business – including architectural building control, golf shop operations, membership management, fine dining, bar, corporate functions, internet billing, telephony billing, course and estate maintenance, concierge services and finance administration. The capability is in place to also use the solution for property development and land sales in the near future.

Benefits

It didn’t take long to realise a financial return on investment. With the support of ClubLINKS’ IT Manager, Kristy Chong, the company is now creating its own reports and custom data views, saving approximately \$150,000 annually in external IT consulting fees. The simpler but more sophisticated solution has also enabled the introduction of in-house IT support, saving a further \$60,000 per year.

Many previous manual processes have been removed or reduced. For example, the generation of owners corporation fee notices used to take two days. With Microsoft Dynamics GP this has been reduced to just one hour. Hanvin estimates that all up, the solution has freed up the equivalent of one staff person for a week per month.

Financial reporting has been centralised and is now more flexible, fulfilling additional requests easily. The POS solution is integrated with the back office financial software ensuring that management can always obtain immediate, timely data relating to stock and revenue.

Customers are represented once only in the CRM system, but the system also captures their multiple relationships with clubs and any associated business rules.

Through Microsoft SharePoint, the intranet has become the central point of communication with staff. Content on individual club websites has also become much easier to update, which in turn has helped to ensure that they are regularly refreshed and retain their relevance.



Workflow management solutions are helping to track and analyse workloads, enabling management to smooth any stress points as the business expands.

Importantly, the solution has already shown itself to be scalable and capable of supporting future growth. Hanvin says, "We now have the flexibility to change the system to suit business needs and this gives us an edge over our competitors. We know we have the best foundation on which to build our business."

The Future

With so much functionality at their fingertips, ClubLINKS staff are likely to continue to refine and develop the software for some time to come. During 2009 for example, Chong plans to create more workflows and grow ClubLINKS' reporting activities through the provision of client and staff specific dashboards.

Hanvin admits it's been a massive project for ClubLINKS. "We went for the big bang, with everything happening at one point in time. This was largely because the old systems relied on each other. Of course there were teething problems, but compared to what we had two or three years ago, we've created a much better environment for staff to work in. We have better tools and the ability to provide useful data and information to staff, management and clients."

Hanvin's advice for anyone considering such a large project is to make sure you get the right people on your team.

"Looking back, we made some mistakes. We tended more towards getting managers involved and we should probably have weighted that towards staff who were dealing with the systems on a daily basis." He also recommends considering the engagement of key external implementation personnel beyond the immediate go live period, like they have done with Professional Advantage. "Whoever has been most involved in the project since day one, assisting you to go live, helping with training and so on, should be around for an extended period. It will save you a lot of grief and frustrated staff, and will ensure you can keep on servicing your customers as the new system is introduced."

Ultimately, Hanvin believes the project has been more than worthwhile. "What ClubLINKS can offer to Developers or existing Clubs is our intellectual property on how to run residential or golfing projects. The most important tool that enables us to do this is our IT system. It builds on our competitive advantage and is key to delivering a one-stop management solution. The whole IT system is a huge plus for us," Hanvin concludes.

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