NGO Improves Awareness, Gains Scalability with New ERP Solution

Overview

Country or Region: India
Industry: Not for Profit

Customer Profile
Founded in 2000, The Akshaya Patra Foundation is a non-profit organization implementing a school meal program with the aim of reaching out to children in government and government-aided schools.

Business Situation
Each branch of Akshaya Patra independently used Tally and Microsoft Excel worksheets to keep accounts and manage processes. Real time consolidated data was thus lacking at the head office.

Solution
With the help of ABS, Akshaya Patra deployed Dynamics AX 2009, a standardized financial-management system to enhance operational efficiency, consolidate data and reduce reporting burdens.

Benefits
• Offers real time consolidated data
• Controls complex financial processes
• Centralization saves time
• Improves adaptability of employees

"Incorporating customized workflows have led to major improvements in efficiency and time, helping us in getting approvals when people are on the move or working from different offices."

Somashekar SM, General Manager – Finance & Accounts, The Akshaya Patra Foundation

The Akshaya Patra Foundation serves midday meals to underprivileged children at 20 locations across the country. With an independent accounting solution at each branch, the challenge was how to collate information accurately at the head office in time for it to be useful. Moreover, it wanted it to use the latest technology to maximize efficiency and incur minimum costs. Working with Microsoft Certified Partner, Affordable Business Solutions, Akshaya Patra implemented Microsoft Dynamics AX 2009 to integrate all its locations and processes. This centrally managed solution helps the organization acquire the desired scalability and visibility into all aspects of the process and distribution. It enables the use of real time information for reviews, analysis and meetings. It also increases efficiency, saves time and resources. And, last but not the least, it definitely facilitates future growth.

Situation

Headquartered in Bengaluru, The Akshaya Patra Foundation is an Indian not-for-profit organization. Established in 2000 by ISKCON Bengaluru, it aims to provide nutritious midday meals to disadvantaged children in India. In 2003, it partnered with the Karnataka government under the midday meal scheme. Today, it works with central and state governments in 10 states. It provides midday meals to 1.3 million children in 9,000 government and government-aided schools across 10 states and 20 locations each day. It hopes to feed five million underprivileged children by 2020.

Built on a public-private partnership, Akshaya Patra uses technology to maximize efficiency and minimize cost, time and labor in both cooking and delivery. It has kitchens in 20 locations and an on-ground team on 5,800 people. Another 400 members manage the operations.

Until 2011, each branch was managing finance independently using Tally and Microsoft Excel. "We were hard-pressed to compile reports from each location by the 10th of every month," recollects Somashekhar SM, General Manager – Finance & Accounts, The Akshaya Patra Foundation. "The process was time consuming and resource hungry. Sometimes we would be late, by which time it had lost its relevance. Additionally, data was sometimes inconsistent and there were unresolved variances." The organization also lacked real time information on inter-branch stock or cash transactions. Accurate expenditure statements were not available on time.

As the number of locations increased, the need for an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution was evident. Akshaya Patra wanted to consolidate branch data at the headquarters in real time.

Solution

Akshaya Patra believes in combining good management, innovative technology and smart engineering at a minimal cost. To achieve the same with its ERP implementation, it evaluated Microsoft Dynamics NAV, Dynamics AX and SAP. "We chose Dynamics AX 2009 as we wanted to deploy a process-driven business solution to consolidate all our financial data and centralize information management and reporting," recalls Vinay Kumar, Head - ERP, The Akshaya Patra Foundation. "We found Dynamics AX to be ideal as it provides core ERP functionality for financials as well as operations management."

Though the organization considered multiple implementation partners, Microsoft recommended Affordable Business Solutions (ABS). The implementation started in November 2010 and the prototype was ready in February 2011. ABS imparted training to various teams using the 'train-the-trainer' concept. Initially there were parallel entries in Tally and Dynamics AX, until the solution went live in April 2011, when the organization totally switched to ERP. The date of going live was significant, the financial year has just begun and the schools are closed were closed. This gave the organization time to stabilize operations in a lean period.

Phase 1: Implementation
ABS created a master database and replicated all the information in the new ERP solution. Initially the solution went live at four locations with all the default modules, including general ledger, accounts payable, and accounts receivables, inventory, master planning, human resource and administration. It took

nine months to stabilize, overcoming challenges such as internet and connectivity, and training members to use the solution. "All our members are not IT-savvy, but with a simple and familiar user interface, akin to Microsoft Office, the adoption of ERP increased steadily and quickly," explains Lalitha B, Manager — ERP.

By May 2013, 19 locations were using the solution. Initially planned for 80 users, the number increased to 300 named and 150 concurrent users respectively. The organization expects to reach 350 users in the future.

Phase 2: Create Custom Modules

ABS created a module specifically to meet the requirements of a not-for-profit organization and the midday meal program. It covers distribution, school management, logistics and incoming quality check in stores. This unique workflow includes a menu planner to deliver specific items to specific schools or a set of schools, along with a route planner and indent planner.

It then generates production orders confirming the quantity of menu items, updates the consumption of raw materials for actuals consumed, and replenishes stores accordingly. It also checks the quality and quantity using a unique quality order form and finally generates a report after the distribution process is complete.

It simultaneously maintains a trip journal and vessel journal. Lastly, it updates the billing form to capture delivery and enrolment data and gives a school-specific summary. For delivery, it also designed a School Master that enables delivery more than once a day, captures history of enrolment, or swapping of schools and routes for delivery.

Phase 3: Integration

To further reduce the burden and automate tasks phase three included integration with emails to automate email alerts and reminders.

In addition, it has integrated SQL Server Reporting Services to generate custom reports for the management. This generates dynamic reports based on the needs of management for quicker analyses and decision-making. For example, the central procurement team uses SSRS-based reports for consolidated procurement of high-cost items at all the 19 locations, thus presenting consolidated data at the headquarters.

Benefits

The ERP centralizes all the major functions to make Akshaya Patra a single unit versus a federation of locations. The financial system is capable of evolving and adapting to changing business needs. It enables real time information and reports for management use.

Offers Real Time Consolidated Data

Availability of real time data across the organization is the biggest gain. It imposes discipline, minimizes errors and eliminates the earlier practice of backdating and deletion. "All the branches and the head office review the same version of data, thus providing a better insight into business processes across the organization and enabling the team to manage their activities smoothly," says Vikram Kothari, Deputy General Manager – Finance and Accounts, The Akshaya Patra Foundation.

Controls Complex Financial Processes

Prior to Dynamics AX, the team used manual methods and Excel worksheets in multiple formats for collating data at month-end, resulting in inconsistencies and duplication. The new system configures

complex scenarios, centrally administers accounting to facilitate accurate information from all the branches and presents it to all the stakeholders on time. "With Dynamics AX, we have all the information we need. Our reports are ready by the 5[th]of the month, giving the management time to review and analyze data before presenting it," says Somashekar SM, General Manager – Finance & Accounts, The Akshaya Patra Foundation. "Incorporating customized workflows have led to major improvements in efficiency, helping us get approvals when people are on the move or working from different offices."

Centralization Saves Time
Due to a centralized system, Akshaya Patra acts as a single unit instead of a federation of different kitchens. It enables branches to share the same data, business rules and processes, thus harmonizing and streamlining business practices that save time. With centralization of accounts, payroll, procurement and sourcing, the system helps the organization to identify weak or inefficient branches and improve their working. "We can now perform long-term strategic planning; people at all levels are aware of the operational context and can take appropriate action for improvement and betterment," states Arun Kumar V, Manager — Operations, The Akshaya Patra Foundation, Vasanthapura Kitchen.

Arun explains with an example, "Earlier, the distribution required 35 persons working for four hours a day to smoothly manage the kitchen and delivery schedules. With Dynamics AX, this is taken care of with the help of four persons working for four hours."

Improves Adaptability of Employees
With implementation of Dynamics AX, Akshaya Patra has educated its employees on the use of technology. The system is user friendly and easy enough to use for non-tech-savvy users in branches. "Our employees are adapting to change. We are proud to acknowledge that now our entire team is adhering to Dynamics AX, even though some of our team members were pen-and-paper or Excel users earlier," states Venkatachalan BS, General Manager – Human Resources, The Akshaya Patra Foundation. "At the same time, the management's insistence on continuing to use ERP for all the processes has further improved computer literacy, widened horizons and the ability to think.

Foundation for Future Growth
"Deploying Dynamics AX was strategic as we now work with a world-class ERP and accounting solution," says Shridhar Venkat, Executive Director, The Akshaya Patra Foundation. Adaptability, ability to increase the number of users and add more locations whenever desired lays the foundation for future growth. "With streamlined processes, transparency in workflows and excellence in operations, Akshaya Patra has become a source of inspiration for other NGOs to use technology and automate processes. Thus it integrates all locations on a single platform," concludes Shridhar Venkat, Executive Director.

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers in the United States and Canada who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to:
www.microsoft.com

For more information about The Akshaya Patra Foundation products and services, call (91) (80) 3014 3400 or visit the website at: www.akshayapatra.org

For more information about ABS products and services, call (91) (80) 4245 7457 or visit the website at: www.abs.in

Microsoft Dynamics

Microsoft Dynamics is a line of integrated, adaptable business management solutions that enables you and your people to make business decisions with greater confidence. Microsoft Dynamics works like familiar Microsoft software such as Microsoft Office, which means less of a learning curve for your people, so they can get up and running quickly and focus on what's most important. And because it is from Microsoft, it easily works with the systems that your company already has implemented. By automating and streamlining financial, customer relationship, and supply chain processes, Microsoft Dynamics brings together people, processes, and technologies, increasing the productivity and effectiveness of your business, and helping you drive business success.

For more information about Microsoft Dynamics, go to:
www.microsoft.com/dynamics

About Affordable Business Solutions

Affordable Business Solutions (ABS) is a consulting organization that addresses the small and medium business enterprises in India and offers them business transformation consultancy services. The services include ERP readiness consulting services, rapid usage methodology for implementation and change management and effective end-user education leveraging Affordable Business Solutions' Center for functional excellence. It specializes in business process evaluation, functional skill up-gradation and technology solutions leveraging world-class packaged applications on a software-as-a-service model.

Software and Services
- Microsoft Dynamics AX 2009
- SQL Reporting Services

Partner
Affordable Business Solutions