

STERLING INN

Solution Overview

Industry

Hospitality

Scenario

An out-dated accounting system and lack of automation was holding this hotel back until it implemented Microsoft Great Plains Dynamics.

Company Profile

This 155-room Sterling Inn caters to business clientele and travelers near downtown Detroit.

Situation

Using Microsoft Dynamics Financials and Human Resources solutions, Sterling Inn has dramatically improved their ability to analyze business information and significantly improved their HR processes.

Software Used

Microsoft Business Solutions
Dynamics
Financials
Human Resources
Payroll
Payroll Direct Deposit
Microsoft SQL Server 7.0
Jaguar (Hospitality Solutions)

Managers of the Sterling Inn in Sterling Heights, Michigan, felt their DOS-based business management system was holding them back. Bringing data together from the various applications required time-consuming, repetitive manual processing. This lack of automation also meant that Sterling had to limit the number and types of reports they created. By implementing an integrated business management solution with Microsoft Great Plains Dynamics at the center, Sterling Inn is saving time and has dramatically improved their ability to analyze information throughout their business.

Located 15 miles northeast of downtown Detroit, the 155-room Sterling Inn caters to business clientele as well as travelers. Restaurant, banquet, catering and conference facilities represent a significant portion of Sterling's business, and require their own business processes in addition to the hotel management functions.

DOS-based System Shows Age

The DOS-based hotel management system Sterling had purchased about a decade ago was causing frustrations. Users accustomed to Windows-based packages found it difficult to navigate the complicated menu system. The only way to extract information from the system in most cases was through paper reports, and the information from these reports often had to be entered by hand into spreadsheets. Posting operations, printing reports and other processes took a long period of time and, while they were running, users had to deal with lengthy response times.

Decision to Upgrade

Victor Martin, President of the Sterling Inn, made the decision to upgrade to new software based on the latest Microsoft Windows technology. "The developer of our hotel system was abandoning their DOS-based system in favor of a new Windows package," Martin said. "They were planning to eliminate their accounting system and also drop support for sales and catering. This prompted us to look for a new hotel solution. We selected Jaguar from Hospitality Solutions International because it offers a modern solution with strong sales and catering capabilities."

Selecting an Open Accounting System

Like nearly all hospitality software today, Jaguar does not provide an accounting system but instead recommends that users choose from the leading mid-market solutions. "We began by evaluating various technology foundations and made a commitment to use the Microsoft SQL Server database because we believe it offers the fastest performance, greatest resistance to data loss and the ability to communicate with a large number of third party packages," Martin said. "That decision, reduced our choice to just a few mid-market accounting packages, each of which would have probably met our immediate needs. But, we wanted to select a product that would provide much more advanced capabilities that we could utilize in the future as we grew."

"Dynamics is wide open—you can add features, create your own menus, build automated routines, connect to the Internet, in a word, shape the program to fit your business to a tee with little or no programming."

Victor Martin
President
Sterling Inn

"I would estimate that our accounting staff saves about 5 hours of every 40-hour week. As we grow, we expect that

"Dynamics stood head and shoulders above the other packages that we looked at, because of its expandability," Martin continued. "While our initial implementation didn't take full advantage of these capabilities, we are planning to expand our accounting operations over time and are confident that we have a program with plenty of headroom that will allow us to automate nearly every aspect of our financial operations in the future."

Saving Time in Data Entry

Lori Abbey, Controller for the Sterling Inn, said that implementation of the new software has already saved considerable amounts of time. "The time that is required to perform nearly any accounting task is substantially reduced with the new software," Abbey said. "Rather than making me enter every last piece of information, I just have to enter the bare minimum needed to define my intentions. For example, to select a supplier I just type the first few letters of their name and the vendor pops up."

Obtaining Information Faster

Abbey said the one of the most important advantages of the new software is the way it helps her find information faster. "Rather than having to retype information from reports that don't quite fit what I need," she said, "I can modify the report or create a new one from scratch with the Dynamics Report Writer. These reports can draw data from any module or table and can include filters and calculated fields. It's so easy to create a Dynamics report that I rarely have to transfer information to spreadsheets any more. The FRx Financial Reporter lets me generate financial statements in exactly the format I need simply by selecting rows such as account codes and columns such as dates."

Solid integration

The ability of Dynamics to interface with a wide range of other software has helped the company save time by automating business processes. First of all, the company created an interface to automatically transfer revenue information from Jaguar to Dynamics. Dynamics includes an integration tool that made it possible to create the interface in a short period of time without any coding. Now, it only takes a few minutes each day to import the revenue information from the hotel management system. In the same way, files generated by the company's time clock are now automatically read into the system, saving considerable amounts of manual data entry time and preventing data-entry errors.

Improving Human Resource Processes

Prior to implementing Dynamics Human Resources and Payroll modules, the process of providing 401k information to the company's plan administrator was a painstaking and time-consuming one. Each month Abbey generated a spreadsheet that detailed the contributions of each employee and their investment selections. Using the Dynamics integration tool, Martin created an interface that now generates the required information with the single push of a button. Now Abbey simply e-mails the file to the administrator. Sterling Inn employees are also taking advantage of direct deposit capabilities offered with Dynamics.

Abbey believes that using the Dynamics Human Resources application is helping them save time too. "Human Resources tracks a wide range of information relating to employees

"Before we had Human Resources, we had to pour through our paper records to find the information we needed and then re-record it. All in all, Dynamics provides us with substantial time savings that affect nearly every area of our business."

Lori Abbey
Controller
Sterling Inn

and lets us produce government-mandated reports in much less time than was required in the past," Abbey said. "For example, we track the I-9 employment eligibility forms for each employee. If an employee is injured, we record the information and use it later to generate OSHA reports. Before, we had to pour through our paper records to find that information and then re-record it. All in all, Dynamics provides us with substantial time savings that affect nearly every area of our business."

For more information about Microsoft Business Solutions, visit www.greatplains.com

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