

## **Partnering for Profit: Strengthening your business with technology**

Businesses can almost guarantee positive efficient growth with the right tools and strategies in place. As you focus on the growth of your business, it is important to consider partnering with an IT Solution Provider who can provide the advice, skills, proven expertise and tools to help you respond more readily to market trends and competitive pressures with greater agility particularly with increasing competition within the Latin American and Caribbean regions.

Infotech Caribbean, one of this region's leading Microsoft Gold Certified Partner and End-to-End Services Provider, is one such company whose implementation approach encourages a healthy discussion around the challenges faced by each business, the results each customer wants to achieve and the solutions available to realise these objectives.

The biggest challenge for any company that is in "growth and improvement mode" is having the right talent and appropriate technology deployed and being used by employees across the organisation to provide consistency of service. The biggest challenge for any company providing the technology component is to convince those businesses that even if there is a downturn in their business or conversely - in the economy - that they should still make an investment in information technology. In other words, if all their boats are sinking and the tide is going out, it doesn't necessarily mean that they have to build bigger boats. What it means though is that with the tide sure to come back in - those boats need to be more efficient!

Every day, you pursue your business model with your vision and goals. You serve customers, locate new revenue opportunities, strive to outperform competitors and accomplish as much as possible with limited resources. You build productive relationships with vendors and business partners and you look for the highest possible return on your investment.

"Many of the best solutions available today are modular, so you are able to implement only the functionality that you need now and make enhancements and upgrades as your organisational requirements change in the future", says Judith Brown, Infotech's Business Development Manager for their Business Solutions portfolio.

This was the case for The Beacon Insurance Company, one of Trinidad's leading Insurance Companies. They saw an increase in their Group Health Portfolio and needed a structured accounting program that would generate the necessary forms and integrate with other functions - utilised by General and Life Insurance departments - seamlessly.

"As an old version Great Plains (GP) customer, Infotech recommended an upgrade to Microsoft Dynamics GP version 10 which had more features that The Beacon could immediately take advantage "We could now report efficiently to both our internal and external customers, analyse information more accurately, update customers' records in real time and capture the details required to not only set up the necessary controls but understand and monitor customer transactions to deliver better service and drive efficiency," remarked a confident Sherwyn Mathura, Systems Analyst at The Beacon Insurance. "The only thing constant really is change," Mathura continued "and the

customisation possibilities of the Microsoft Dynamics GP software was a huge plus for The Beacon.”

If you want to take your business forward using technology wisely, then it is important to examine key indicators that can signal that change is required. What happens when your workers need to enter and access information in too many different applications, causing errors? Because of disparate software, people in one department may not be able to fully integrate or exchange information with their coworkers in other departments. Systems administrators may get an unprecedented number of requests for workarounds that strain the capabilities of current software and finally employee productivity may not benefit from software tools. Here is where your business needs to determine if its current technology is restricting movement or stunting growth?

“Great Plains originally gave us the functionality and flexibility to handle the complexities faced by our organisation. In the decision to upgrade, Microsoft Dynamics GP was selected based on our budget allocation. It provided us with the functionality, security and scalability and allowed for easy integration throughout our entire organisation” said Shoraz Hosein, Information Technology Manager, Electrical Industries Limited (EIL).

Driven by a vision to be “a model organisation, second to none in the private sector of Trinidad and Tobago” Hosein applauded Infotech for their excellent project management skills and knowledge in ensuring that EIL achieved their goals identified in creating an environment in which employees could focus on being innovative and immediately responsive to opportunities for growth. “In phase two, we would like to extend and include our customers and vendors through business portals allowing us to manage placed orders and improve our supply chain infrastructure,” said this forward thinking executive.

A strong business management system can improve efficiencies in distribution and supply chain management, help control costs and use limited resources to accomplish optimal results. “Computerisation can also act as a sieve in certain areas of development within companies and countries – minimising data corruption, service error and time-wasting practices” says Beatriz Zolezzi, Microsoft Business Solutions former Managing Director.

Is it possible though to look at your business through other angles? Perhaps consider other business management solution opportunities? Are the right goods in the right place, at the right time? Can you make what your customers want better - or more efficiently? And what about your financial management - is your business performance in line with your strategic business objectives?

You closely watch financial performance and financial events affecting your business, and manage your finances as efficiently as possible. What if you could simplify and accelerate financial management and make critical financial information available more easily? The right system could, for example, help minimise the time and effort your staff devotes to month-end closing and an easy-to-use interface can minimise human error in financial processing. A good financial management system could also help you create valuable financial reports based on all relevant information in your organisation.

International Shipping Ltd (ISL), one of the largest Freight Forwarders in Trinidad, needed to procure an alternative to their existing accounting application, Peachtree

Accounting 2005. As a forward thinking, growing company, (recently appointed as the official agent for one of the world's largest shipping lines), International Shipping needed to automate in order to operate more efficiently. "There were three main reasons for looking for an alternative to Peachtree" said Rishi Nirvan-Balroop, Financial Controller at International Shipping, "Our volumes required many concurrent users (approximately 18) whereas Peachtree allowed for just 5 users; we needed better reporting on individual transaction profitability, an auditable trail from the individual profitability to overall profitability and finally we wanted a system that integrated our operations (currently maintained on excel spreadsheets, access databases etc.) with our accounting system to enable a seamless flow with multi-user access and updating."

Microsoft Dynamics GP (Great Plains) allowed for not only the computation of overall profitability but linked this to individual transactional profitability. "Our job number system linked costs and revenues to a particular job, but this report did not feed into the profit and loss statement. We wanted better reports showing costs incurred but not necessarily billed out to customers and reports showing profitability by customers. Great Plains (Microsoft Dynamics GP) allowed us this view and supported a tracking functionality, tagging various fields of data related to cargo movements either coming in or going out, gaining data entry and data access efficiency," Rishi added.

"We hope to gain significant returns in terms of greater coordination of workflow, improved controls over billing and efficiencies in accounting and customer service. We anticipate that the integration with Microsoft Office and the eventual inclusion of non-traditional users will empower employees and managers in a way that will revolutionise the way we work at ISL," concluded Rishi.

Brown sites project management as a key component when considering a supplier; especially when you are considering an Accounting and Financial Management application, "Most companies want the application's "Go-LIVE" to coincide with their new financial year so both parties, customers and vendors, can ill afford to lose out on implementation time initially carved out for project completion or delays in delivery. Customers must agree to timelines and we must be certain that resources are not stretched to the limit," Brown continued.

"We are definitely seeing a trend in Trinidad and within the wider Caribbean region, where businesses are inquiring about and wanting to use technology to their competitive advantage" observes Carol Ann Herrera, Microsoft Business Solutions Partner Account Manager, West Indies and Bermuda. "With the possibility of real time ordering, faster product-to-customer cycles and the leveraging of the Internet towards more effective and immediate real time communications, more and more key players (particularly in the finance and service industries) are viewing technology as a strategic asset" Herrera added.

Unlike older Enterprise Resource Planning [ERP] systems, today's flexible solutions like Microsoft Dynamics GP, can extend to almost any business process or function in an organisation, including budgeting, financial management, inventory control, manufacturing, sales and service and human resources.

Responding to some of the biggest obstacles and considerations faced by companies when deciding to move to a new ERP system, Microsoft continues to make significant R&D investments and functionality enhancements from version to version

to ensure that their suite of Business Solutions, namely Microsoft Dynamics GP, Microsoft Dynamics SL (formerly Solomon Software ) and Microsoft CRM applications adequately meet the needs of businesses today and tomorrow, breaking down natural concerns that customers have with previous ERP Systems:

1. System capability – can it really do more for me than my existing system but at a cost I can afford?
2. Time – can I really afford the time it will take to deploy a new system, to streamline the new technology with what I already have and to invest in the requisite training of my staff?
3. Cost and longevity – will I end up paying too much for a system that will begin to show cracks after 5 years of growth and possibly will not be supported 10 years down the line?

As a further guarantee to the success of their IT implementations, Infotech Caribbean took a strategic decision around project management to ensure that for each of their implementation projects, there is a dedicated and trained project manager. For each requirement, a project manager determines “what is the risk of the requirement not being fulfilled and the probability of the event and its impact”. Brown further added.

With Microsoft Dynamics GP’s robust benefits and Infotech Caribbean’s sound implementation approach - these pain points all quickly dissipate and provide the right combination you need if you want to take your business to the “next level” and partner with technology for profit.