



Microsoft Business Solutions Customer Solution Case Study



Overview

Country or Region: United States
Industry: Lodging, Entertainment, and Gambling

Customer Profile

With 19 four-star hotels across the United States, Millennium Hotels and Resorts is the North American branch of the international Millennium & Copthorne Hotels.

Business Situation

An older Great Plains® Dynamics solution required separate installations at each hotel, resulting in high support and licensing costs, while the outdated Btrieve database led to inefficient processes.

Solution

The company upgraded to Microsoft® Business Solutions–Great Plains 7.5 running on Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000, centralized the solution, and contracted with Microsoft Services Premier Support for technical support.

Benefits

- Achieved a return on investment within three-and-a-half months
- Reduced support costs by 55 percent
- Improved technical support
- Simplified management

Hotel Streamlines Accounting Systems, Simplifies Management

“By upgrading Microsoft Great Plains, centralizing, and using Microsoft Services Premier Support, we achieved ROI [return on investment] within three-and-a-half months.”

Pam Burke, IT Consultant, Millennium Hotels and Resorts

With 19 four-star hotels in cities throughout the United States, Millennium Hotels and Resorts prides itself on its exceptional customer service. Its 10-year-old implementation of Great Plains® Dynamics, on the other hand, was delivering less than exceptional service. Great Plains Dynamics had been installed locally at each of the 19 hotels using an outdated version of the Btrieve database system. The local installations began to cause support issues. Working with InterDyn AKA, the company centralized its installation at one location and upgraded its database to Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000. The company also contracted with Microsoft Services Premier Support for technical support. As a result, the company achieved a return on investment (ROI) in less than four months and implemented a solution that will continue to help streamline business processes.



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“With Microsoft Services Premier Support, we have a guaranteed response time, and we feel secure knowing that the depth of knowledge of Microsoft is always available to any of our users.”

John Edwards, IT Director for North America,
Millennium Hotels and Resorts

Situation

As the international hotel division of Hong Leong Group Singapore, Millennium & Copthorne Hotels operates 88 hotels in 16 countries and is Singapore's largest hotel chain. The company's North American division, Millennium Hotels and Resorts, is headquartered in New York and operates 19 four-star hotels across the United States.

In 1994, Millennium Hotels implemented an early version of Great Plains® Dynamics, running on the Btrieve database system; each property—including headquarters—had its own installation of the accounting software. Although the solution had proved effective for many years, the separate installations began to cause problems over time, because each hotel used the system differently. Members of each hotel's accounting department had to maintain the software as well as perform their jobs, which resulted in lowered productivity. In addition, each location maintained its own Btrieve database, which had a flat file system that could not structure data effectively for reporting purposes. To complicate matters, the increasing amount of incoming information caused the Btrieve databases to perform slowly.

The decentralized implementation of Great Plains also affected how the company managed technical support. When the solution was first installed, supporting each hotel was relatively easy. As needs became more complex, however, each hotel needed more service. And with only one employee supporting all the hotels, receiving timely technical support was often a challenge. Because the support person had to travel to a hotel to resolve issues, support costs were high. And when the support person could not solve issues immediately, hotels faced downtime.

Millennium Hotels and Resorts needed to update its accounting systems. The final push toward a new solution came when Microsoft® Business Solutions, a division of Microsoft, announced that it would no longer be supporting Microsoft Business Solutions—Great Plains® on Btrieve. Although the company debated the merits of switching to a J.D. Edwards accounting solution, it finally opted to upgrade to Microsoft Great Plains 7.5 instead.

Solution

In June 2003, Millennium Hotels and Resorts contacted Microsoft Gold Certified Partner InterDyn AKA to help with the implementation. InterDyn AKA concurred with the plan to upgrade Microsoft Great Plains but also recommended that Millennium Hotels and Resorts centralize its solution at company headquarters. To illustrate the benefits of centralizing, InterDyn AKA calculated that—when one factored in licensing and support costs—upgrading each local installation individually would cost twice as much as upgrading and centralizing. For support, InterDyn AKA recommended that the company use Microsoft Services Premier Support as a technical help desk.

In October 2003, InterDyn AKA upgraded the company's headquarters to Microsoft Great Plains 7.5 running on the Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003 operating system. At the same time, the consulting firm replaced Btrieve with Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000. Now, each hotel accesses the General Ledger module of Microsoft Great Plains by using Terminal Services, a feature of Windows Server 2003. With Terminal Services, the company's 63 users in 19 different locations can now log on to the main system remotely by using Citrix application server computers. In addition, the company uses Internet Information Services (IIS) version 6.0, a Web server designed to manage and monitor the system.

“With Microsoft Services Premier Support supporting our Microsoft Great Plains implementation, we’ve reduced our overall support costs by 55 percent.”

Pam Burke, IT Consultant, Millennium Hotels and Resorts

A key component of the solution entailed the engagement of Premier Support. Like many companies that don’t have a dedicated IT staff, Millennium Hotels and Resorts found supporting its users difficult. InterDyn AKA recommended that the company contract with Premier Support to provide on-site and Web-delivered training sessions, both for users and for the internal help desk staff. With the service, users can call Premier Support at any time to receive support for Microsoft Great Plains; the issues are resolved directly, either by phone or through the remote management of systems. For on-site support of its technical infrastructure, Millennium Hotels and Resorts continues to rely on InterDyn AKA.

Benefits

Millennium Hotels and Resorts has already seen a variety of benefits from upgrading and centralizing its accounting solution—including saved licensing costs, boosted employee productivity, and improved technical support resources. Furthermore, by implementing a centralized solution, the company has been able to divert the administrative burden of maintaining the systems away from the individual hotels, while still giving each hotel unimpeded access to—and control of—its own records. With its new solution in place, the company is now well-positioned to take advantage of business process improvements.

Achieved a Return on Investment in Less Than Four Months

With a centralized solution, Millennium Hotels and Resorts was able to reduce internal support costs and cut its number of licensing fees from 19 hotels to just 1. As a result, the company achieved a complete return on investment (ROI) within a short period of time. “By upgrading Microsoft Great Plains, centralizing, and using Microsoft Services

Premier Support, we achieved ROI within three-and-a-half months,” says Burke.

Reduced Support Costs by 55 Percent

Under the previous solution, Millennium Hotels and Resorts was spending 40 percent of its entire IT budget to provide service to 63 users in 19 locations. However, by replacing its internal resource with Premier Support to provide assistance with Microsoft Great Plains software issues and InterDyn AKA for general support, the company has been able to obtain technical assistance for less than half of what the internal resource cost. “With Microsoft Services Premier Support supporting our Microsoft Great Plains implementation—instead of the company relying on a single internal resource—we’ve reduced our overall support costs by 55 percent,” says Burke.

Improved Technical Support

For Millennium Hotels and Resorts, using Premier Support as a help desk for its Microsoft Great Plains environment has also resulted in much better service than the company received in the past. The company can now tap into a full support structure—with dedicated support individuals—that is available whenever users require it. Issues are resolved more quickly, because users are encouraged to call any time they have an issue, instead of having to rely on a single support person’s schedule. Furthermore, the support that Millennium Hotels and Resorts employees receive is far more effective than it was in the past. “With Microsoft Services Premier Support, we have a guaranteed response time,” explains John Edwards, IT Director for North America for Millennium Hotels and Resorts. “And we feel secure knowing that the depth of knowledge of Microsoft is always available to any of our users.”

Simplified Management

Millennium Hotels and Resorts has greatly simplified the management of its accounting solution. "Now that we've upgraded our solution, it's much easier to manage," says Burke. "We've been able to take the burden of worrying about the solution away from hotels, yet we've given them the same level of control over their data."

With simplified management, the company has also improved the quality of its financial data. Burke explains that the company is now able to standardize its processes, rather than having 19 hotels with 19 different systems. "Now that we can monitor and control our systems centrally, we can also create standards for reports, security, and other functions," she says.

Boosted Productivity

Eliminating the need for each hotel's accounting department to maintain a separate accounting program has led to higher employee productivity—key people now have more time to focus on their jobs. Furthermore, having a reliable external resource for immediate technical assistance has boosted the company's ability to complete key financial tasks on time. "Between Microsoft Services Premier Support and InterDyn AKA, Millennium Hotels and Resorts has the tools it needs to improve its productivity," says Monique Lopez, Director of Client Relations for InterDyn AKA. "This is a clear example of how an accounting office that needs to be concerned with its business does not need to be concerned about its accounting software, because it's supported by the home office."

Improved Access to Data

Now that each company maintains a file on the centralized SQL Server 2000 database, employees also have faster access to their records. Although discontinued support for Btrieve may have acted as a catalyst for the

company to upgrade its Microsoft Great Plains solution, performance had been an issue for quite some time. Because Btrieve is a flat-file database system, it does not structure data; therefore, the more data it contains, the slower it runs, because it has more information to sort. SQL Server 2000, however, structures data so that size of database does not equate to loss of speed. "Now that we're using SQL Server 2000, hotels access their information in a fraction of the time it took using Btrieve," says Burke.

Enhanced Business Processes

Millennium Hotels and Resorts views its new solution as a concrete way to improve its business processes. For example, creating financial reports had traditionally been a cumbersome process; each hotel created its own financial reports and then exported the results to a Microsoft Office Excel 2003 worksheet. All the worksheets were then consolidated at headquarters. The company has recently upgraded to Microsoft Business Solutions for Analytics—FRx® Professional, a reporting solution that creates customized reports directly from Microsoft Great Plains. As a result, Millennium Hotels and Resorts will be able to significantly reduce the effort needed to create, consolidate, and distribute financial reports throughout the organization while standardizing the financial statements to be used by all the hotels.

The company attributes its ability to streamline its business processes to the level of support it receives both from InterDyn AKA and Microsoft. "One of the biggest benefits of using Microsoft Services Premier Support is that it is helping us with business process change," says Burke. "And that only makes us more competitive."

For More Information

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For more information about InterDyn AKA products and services, call (212) 629-6001 or visit the Web site at: www.akaes.com

For more information about Millennium Hotels and Resorts products and services, call (800) 892-7444 or visit the Web site at: www.millenniumhotels.com

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Software and Services

- Microsoft Windows Server System™
 - Microsoft Windows Server 2003, Standard Edition
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2000
- Microsoft Office System
 - Microsoft Office Excel 2003
- Microsoft Business Solutions for Analytics–FRx Professional
- Microsoft Business Solutions–Great Plains 7.5

■ Services

- Microsoft Services Premier Support
- ### ■ Technologies
- Internet Information Services 6.0
 - Terminal Services

Hardware

- Citrix application server computers

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