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Case Study

The Salvation Army Improves Productivity and Expands Reporting Capabilities

Many Americans look to The Salvation Army for food, shelter, and warmth. Over the past seven years, The Salvation Army has helped nearly a quarter of a billion people in the United States. As a not-for-profit organization, The Salvation Army must follow special reporting guidelines and adhere to strict regulations, often requiring manual manipulation of complex accounting data. To meet these requirements, The Salvation Army U.S.A. Western Territory needed a solution with advanced reporting options capable of system wide scalability across its 12 operating divisions. After deploying Microsoft Dynamics™ GP with help from Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner **Collins Computing**. The Salvation Army increased productivity by automating not-for-profit accounting functions and improved its divisional performance insight with richer reporting capabilities.

Situation

The Salvation Army is a Christian organization that serves the physical, spiritual, and emotional needs of individuals through social services, counseling, rehabilitation, and disaster relief. The U.S.A. Western Territory of The Salvation Army spans 13 western states and has headquarters in Long Beach, California. With 12 servers hosting 450 independent databases across the Western Territory, it was important to find a solution that would both automate accounting functions and enable—and hopefully streamline—the sharing of information, applications, and processes among divisions.

Until recently, The Salvation Army spent more time than it wanted to balancing funds, creating customized reports to comply with regulatory requirements, and accessing division- and fund-specific information. Because The Salvation Army is conservative in its technology spending, the organization implements new products only when strong business needs make a compelling case for the investment. According to Clarence White, Chief Information Officer for The Salvation Army, "We had several great reasons to implement Microsoft Dynamics™ GP: to eliminate the need for manual balancing in fund accounting, to better monitor company performance by division, and to streamline the financial consolidation of our hundreds of operating units."

The principles of fund accounting require The Salvation Army to demonstrate that donation and grant monies have been used in accordance with stipulated restrictions. Failure to adequately record how the funds are spent (that is, in accordance with any restrictions the contributor specified) can result in serious consequences, including loss of funding and tax-exempt status.

Solution

With assistance from Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner **Collins Computing,** The Salvation Army upgraded its Microsoft Dynamics GP accounting system in just three months for customized, not-for-profit accounting functionality, expanded reporting capabilities, and system wide scalability.

Customized Functionality

When The Salvation Army originally deployed Microsoft Business Solutions–Great Plains® 6.0 (now part of Microsoft Dynamics), it lacked automated fund accounting capabilities. To overcome this limitation, The Salvation Army engaged **Collins Computing** to design a custom fund-balancing program. Although the newly deployed Microsoft Dynamics GP includes fund balancing and accounting functions, the organization elected to rely on the legacy application for this functionality. **Collins Computing** was able to seamlessly integrate its custom modules with Microsoft Dynamics GP, which resulted in a tailored, more powerful solution.

Collins Computing used Microsoft Great Plains Dexterity®, a development tool that provides the same components used to create Microsoft Dynamics GP, to attach logic to the Fund Balance System it created. This enabled Dexterity to work with Microsoft Dynamics GP at the application level, making it the best choice to create and modify the large-volume, transaction-based, client/server applications of The Salvation Army. In addition, Dexterity integrated seamlessly with Microsoft Dynamics GP modules and allowed **Collins Computing** to create and grant permissions to a Microsoft SQL Server™ 2000 table, test the customizations, and facilitate deployment throughout The Salvation Army environment. By enabling The Salvation Army staff to continue to use the **Collins Computing** Fund Balance System with which they were already familiar, the organization minimized employee training requirements.

In addition to automating fund balancing, this functionality allows The Salvation Army to run separate reports for each division within the organization and to create both centralized reports and fund-specific accounting reports. This custom, hierarchical reporting structure eliminates the need to manually balance each fund within each division. According to Abra Lynne Gilman, Senior Consultant for **Collins Computing**, "The Microsoft Dynamics GP architecture made it easy to customize functionality and automate fund balancing to meet The Salvation Army's specific preferences."

Expanded Reporting Capabilities

Microsoft Dynamics GP provides customizable SmartList queries and allows integration with e-mail and browser applications to ensure that Salvation Army executives, analysts, and auditors have access to the right information at the right time. By allowing users to instantly create queries or access preconfigured SmartList queries, Microsoft Dynamics GP ensures that vital information is more accessible than ever. Query results can be exported to Microsoft Office Excel® 2003 and Microsoft Office Word 2003 with a single click. Users link to Microsoft Dynamics GP data directly from within Microsoft Office applications by using smart tags to speed access to relevant information. SmartLists instantly create sophisticated queries, which staff can then save and share with each other throughout The Salvation Army, regardless of division or location.

Microsoft FRx®—part of the Microsoft Dynamics GP toolkit— facilitates improved data-sharing capabilities and consolidation of reports for The Salvation Army. Microsoft FRx supports the design, creation, and distribution of managerial financial reports and includes special business logic and capabilities that recognize the nuances of the accounting discipline and the complexities of general ledger systems. Microsoft FRx enhances Microsoft Dynamics GP to help meet the specific business challenges of The Salvation Army.

In addition to the standard reporting capabilities of Microsoft Dynamics GP, The Salvation Army was easily able to extend financial reporting functionality using the capabilities of Microsoft .NET technology and Microsoft SQL Server 2000 Reporting Services.

The Salvation Army also created a custom Microsoft Visual Basic® .NET, Web-based application that provides real-time business intelligence to Salvation Army managers. This "Ministry Snapshot" application pulls data from several consolidated enterprise databases (including Microsoft Dynamics GP). At its core, it relies upon a series of scoring algorithms, so that hundreds of statistical and financial data are boiled down to graphical displays that, at a glance, show and compare the relative efficiency of each operating unit. Several different methods of displaying unit performance are available, including a "Boston Matrix" style graph, color-coded maps, and business scorecards. Decision makers can find out how they stack up against the rest of the

organization and see at a glance the three-year financial and statistical trends. Additional information— such as detailed community demographics, a complete leadership history, and other contextual data needed to interpret the scorecard—is available through simple links.

SQL Server 2005 Reporting Services, a component of Microsoft SQL Server, has also been leveraged to deploy custom reports to managers all over The Salvation Army. Up-to-the-minute reports comparing budget and actual expenses are available to non-accountant consumers of financial data. These and other easy-to-use reports and graphs have allowed The Salvation Army to securely expose financial data to those who need it to perform their duties, but who do not need the full sophistication of the Microsoft Dynamics GP client.

Microsoft Dynamics GP and Microsoft SQL Server 2000

Virtual Interface Architecture system-area networks in SQL Server 2000 provide high-speed connectivity between the Microsoft Dynamics GP application server and The Salvation Army database servers. Microsoft Dynamics GP works with SQL Server 2000 Analysis Services to deliver richer business insight through improved data-mining capabilities. In consideration of this and other factors, The Salvation Army Western Territory used Microsoft SQL Server 7.0 to consolidate the 12 Microsoft Dynamics GP implementations running in the territory's divisional headquarters into a single, centrally managed SQL Server 2000 deployment at the Long Beach headquarters. SQL Server 2000 extends the performance, reliability, quality, and ease of use of SQL Server 7.0.

SQL Server 2000 supports running multiple instances of the relational database engine on the same computer. With SQL Server 7.0, each computer could run only one instance of the relational database engine. Now, applications can connect to each instance on a computer the same way they connect to instances of SQL Server running on different computers. The entire Western Territory is now managed and hosted in one location instead of 12 completely disparate sites.

In addition to simplified processes for the staff on a daily basis, other related benefits include the increased security that comes with single-site backups, decreased costs associated with travel for support issues across the territory, and reduced workload for the database

administrator, who reported fewer service issues after deploying SQL Server 2000. By utilizing Microsoft FRx in conjunction with Microsoft Dynamics GP and SQL Server 2000, The Salvation Army gains immediate control of its financial reporting process and enjoys more effective management and growth of the organization.

System wide Scalability

Microsoft Dynamics GP is scalable to meet the growth and changing needs of The Salvation Army. Although this deployment serves only The Salvation Army U.S.A. Western Territory, two of the other three U.S. territories—the Central Territory and the Southern Territory—also use Microsoft Dynamics GP; The Salvation Army U.S. National Headquarters in Washington, D.C., also processes many transactions within the Microsoft Dynamics GP system. The Salvation Army is now in a position to unify accounting and reporting across all four U.S. territories at any time in the future.

Rapid Implementation

According to White, "Implementation was an aggressive, three-month schedule and virtually transparent for the users." The Salvation Army accomplished the bulk of its implementation prep-aration during the weekdays and completed its data conversions over the weekend. "We could have done it all in one weekend, because of the centralized infrastructure," continues White. "But to make the transition to Microsoft Dynamics GP, without disruption for users, we chose a more gradual implementation over a three-month period." The straightforward, wizard-driven installation and setup, online self-service, and assisted technical support of Microsoft Dynamics GP combined with the expert, in-person training services **Collins Computing** provided made for a smooth and rapid implementation.

Collins Computing

The right training and support make the difference between a system that's integral and a system that's underutilized. **Collins Computing** believes in building customer relationships based on providing value. With talented, certified professionals and proven methodologies, it's no surprise that The Salvation Army continues to use the services of Collins Computing.

Benefits

With Microsoft Dynamics GP, The Salvation Army management team can easily access and cross-reference data across divisions for a clearer picture of each division's performance and requirements. Microsoft Dynamics GP is easy enough for non-accountants to use, but advanced enough to automate various accounting functions.

The new fund-balancing functionality eliminates manual calculations and reduces errors, thereby allowing The Salvation Army to spend less time dealing with technology and accounting processes and more time focusing on its mission of doing the most good.

Proves Easy to Use

Microsoft Dynamics GP offers customizable information views and the ability to perform multiple transactions from within a single window, enabling Salvation Army employees to initiate tasks quickly and easily. With a similar look and feel to Microsoft Office Outlook® 2003, along with list-based navigation and streamlined menus, everyone in the organization benefits from a clean, intuitive interface.

Improves Productivity

With automated fund balancing, The Salvation Army no longer needs to manually balance funds; automation not only saves time but reduces errors, as well. The Salvation Army's customized cash receipts functionality offers an easy way to receive and record donations in addition to normal accounts receivable transactions; there's no longer a need for two separate processes.

Enables Advanced Reporting Capabilities

Bolstered by the Analysis Services of SQL Server 2000, Microsoft Dynamics GP allows The Salvation Army to perform deeper data mining queries. New analytical tools enable better insight into The Salvation Army's current operations and statistical performance, thereby helping the organization to make an intelligent analysis of overall performance with trends. Separate reporting capabilities and financials allow managers and division leaders to view information for each division within the organization.

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