

Case Study: Brand Slam

An Instant Love Affair with Business Intelligence at Brand Slam Fashion

“Nobody at Brand Slam wanted business intelligence – until they saw PrecisionPoint.”

“If I took PrecisionPoint away, we wouldn’t know how to run the business without it,” says Simon O’Sullivan, business systems manager at Brand Slam. “It has become a central component of how we manage. If you are trying to be small, fast, responsive and efficient, you can’t do it without a proper business intelligence tool, which is what we now have.”

Background

Brand Slam Ltd is a two year old brand management company based in London, set up by Marcia Kilgore, who had previously founded and sold Bliss Spa. Brand Slam’s sales in 2008, its first full year, were \$35 million and are projected to be \$55 million in 2009, with a similar increase in 2010. It has 30 employees, mainly in marketing, sales and product development.

It has developed two initial brands. The Soap & Glory cosmetics range is manufactured and sold by Boots under licence. In contrast, it manages the FitFlop women’s fitness footwear range which it manufactures in China. It sells direct in the United Kingdom and the United States of America and to distributors in other markets worldwide. It is a very fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) business that has 1,000 customers ordering 300 different stock items.



Problem

To run the two businesses, Brand Slam selected Microsoft Dynamics NAV with Pebblestone Fashion, an add-on vertical solution Certified for Microsoft Dynamics NAV. Implementation was started by a third party, but was switched to Clarita Solutions, a Microsoft Dynamics Certified Partner, which has knowledge of the fashion footwear industry and the Pebblestone Fashion software. It went live in February, 2008.

O’Sullivan has worked in the fashion footwear business for his whole career and has implemented a wide range of bespoke and packaged software. “They all have reporting, but it is all very limited, relying on old-fashion listing-type reports. They don’t work particularly well and none have real business intelligence,” he says. “They don’t help you to understand what is happening in the business and how to manage it tactically.”

He is a big fan of business intelligence, or BI, especially multidimensional database cubes for analysis and reporting (also known as online analytical processing or OLAP). He knew how much BI could deliver and the benefits it would bring by very quickly getting to actionable information. “The users had never used proper business intelligence suites before in their previous companies and wouldn’t believe me,” he says. “They said the Microsoft Dynamics NAV reports would be fine, but business intelligence is a different world.”

Solution

O’Sullivan was convinced that the users would need a business intelligence system to access the data within NAV and evaluated Business Analytics, a Microsoft module for Dynamics NAV based on the TARGIT BI Suite, which was not as good as the software he had used before. He then attended an open day at Clarita Solutions, hosted by Microsoft, where PrecisionPoint was demonstrated.

“PrecisionPoint is a proper OLAP tool designed for Microsoft Dynamics NAV,” he says “Because the database and reporting are pre-built, especially the financial reports, implementation would be a ‘no-brainer’. You don’t have to design your own data warehouse, or spend a month surrounded by wallcharts defining star schema databases.” He asked the presenters lots of questions about broad functionality and was delighted to discover that PrecisionPoint for Pebblestone Fashion reflects style, colour and size, which is incredibly important in the footwear business. He also established the broad costs for a company of BrandSlam’s size.

“It was a bit of a hard sell back in the office,” he says, “but I carried on regardless, because I thought that with a demonstration it would sell itself.” Three days later it was presented over the internet using a web conference.

This was followed by a live demonstration of the advanced business intelligence solution to the company’s senior management, including Scott Thomson, the managing director. It used data from Brand Slam’s own Microsoft Dynamics NAV database. “We could see the real life benefits of it immediately,” says O’Sullivan. “We could identify things that didn’t quite look right. It was what the finance manager had been crying out for since we had gone live.”

“We very quickly recognised that although Microsoft Dynamics NAV was a great product,” says Thomson, “we couldn’t actually see much of the data or cut and slice it in the way we wanted. Our instant love affair with PrecisionPoint was triggered because it allows relatively non-technical people to quickly grasp report-building.”

“I could see PrecisionPoint saving us £150,000 per year, through improved supply chain management and reducing the need for additional finance and administration staff.” Scott Thomson, MD of Brand Slam

What really interested Thomson was that after having the data for only 24 hours, the PrecisionPoint Software presenter was able to tell him more about his business than his accounts team could! He then spent two hours looking, not at the reporting, but the information inside the system, raising action points for his commercial team.

“We were able to bring up a new report on screen, quickly produce exception reports and actually see inside the data for the first time without having to go inside multiple Microsoft

Dynamics NAV reports,” he says. “I could see PrecisionPoint saving us £150,000 per year, through improved supply chain management and reducing the need for additional finance and administration staff.”

The management team bought PrecisionPoint the same day. The five user licence included the Financials and Supply Chain modules. With implementation and two days of user training the cost was about £27,500 (\$45,000). The company spent a further £4,000 (\$6,000) on a standard Dell PowerEdge 2950 server, with a Quad Core Intel®Xeon 3.0 GHz processor, 8 GBytes of RAM and six 146GByte SAS hard disks on a RAID controller, running Microsoft Windows Server 2003. The PrecisionPoint Software license included a runtime Microsoft SQLServer 2005 Standard Edition license for 5 users.

In Use

Implementation took two weeks elapsed time, with PrecisionPoint Software building the data warehouse from the Dynamics NAV database and incorporating the company's own terminology and codes. O'Sullivan spent about two days in total discussing the details with the PrecisionPoint consultant and the system went live in May 2008. Special analysis was added for 'Free to Sell', stock plus purchase orders shipped or due to ship, and "Order Differences", tracking damage or short falls in shipments received.

The five 'Power-Users' are the managing director, operations director, commercial manager, finance manager and financial controller. They can access all reports and specify new ones, without any programming or technical help, using Microsoft Excel with XLPublisher, PrecisionPoint Software's Microsoft Excel add-in for high-quality report building and publishing.

“You could decide to buy [PrecisionPoint] and a week later be up and running, building reports, looking at your data and discovering information straight away that you knew was somewhere in the ERP system but couldn't get at.”

Simon O'Sullivan, Business Systems Mgr of Brand Slam.

“They reacted very positively,” says O'Sullivan. “After the training they were all familiar with it and in the first few weeks they built nearly 300 ad hoc reports. I calmed them down from the initial furore of enjoyment and put some structure around what they had built, so we had one version of the truth.”

They now use 20 to 30 reports on a regular basis. The 16 page monthly management pack is automatically printed from PrecisionPoint reports. Ten core reports are automatically converted into dynamic SQL Server Reporting Services (SSRS) reports, using the XLPublisher add-in, and published over the company's extranet, using Microsoft SharePoint Server. From here they are accessed by about 20 people who use Microsoft Dynamics NAV, mainly in customer services and credit control, and six UK sales people. PrecisionPoint provides the access security, determining what information each user can see.

Benefits

The biggest benefits of PrecisionPoint for O'Sullivan are the ease of implementation and rapid return on investment (ROI). “It is very, very simple and 'hands off' from a customer perspective,” he says. “You could decide to buy it and a week later be up and running, building reports, looking at your data and discovering information straight away that you knew was somewhere in the ERP system but couldn't get at.”

It is also operationally much more efficient. The previous rudimentary monthly management pack just reported sales and broad outturn, but took the financial controller a week to prepare. The company now has a very detailed and comprehensive management report that only takes 1 ½ days to prepare.

“PrecisionPoint is much more flexible than traditional reports,” says Thomson. “The more reports you see, the more information you want to see. The system has saved us the time, energy and cost of building endless reports. It allows us to build a report and then re-run and refine it. We can knock up reports „at the drop of a hat“ in order to look at the burning issue of the day.”



This visibility of data is very important to Thomson. He is able to analyse margin by customer, by channel or by item. “We are able to get inside the cube of data to maximise our commercial opportunities,” he says. “If PrecisionPoint identifies one problem with a shipment, that would otherwise have been buried in the system, it could save us \$250,000.”

He finds that the reporting can be used not just for monitoring the business, but to drive its processes. As an FMCG company, Brand Slam has used the BI system to optimise its purchasing each day. It will identify stock reserved for delivery in two months time that can be released to somebody wanting it immediately. It allows the company to minimise its working capital and maximise its customer satisfaction.

The system has also identified business process issues and inefficiencies. For example, it can report unfulfilled sales orders and „at a glance“ identify the causes and issues and to optimise the current available stock position. It will show orders that are not shipped if it will take a customer over their credit limit. It will also report stock waiting for a small balance to arrive before being shipped to a customer who will not accept before being shipped to a customer who will not accept incomplete orders.

As well as reduced inventory, aged debtors are lower in the United Kingdom, where the sales executives access dynamic current aged debtors reports, than in the United States, which is yet to get access to it.

Future

Brand Slam is now adding more user licenses to expand the use of the software. The dynamic reports will shortly be made available to the sales executives in North America. They will also be upgrading to Excel 2007 so that users can browse PrecisionPoint data using the enhanced Pivot-Table feature in desktop Excel and SharePoint Excel Services.

The company is working closely with PrecisionPoint Software to add more fashion industry specific functionality, in order to get more benefits. The sales executives will have dynamic reports of their order book, by customer for the next three months, showing how much can be fulfilled now, how much is based on the stock that will become available, how much will be on time and how much will be late.

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Scott Thomson, MD of Brand Slam

"In fashion footwear, especially in the current market conditions, it is all about what can be delivered now and promised against forward orders, so people comeback with immediate repeat business," says O'Sullivan. "They need free stock every morning so they know what to offer, in terms of availability of additional volumes or alternative colours, such as bronze instead of gold."

The company plans to do as much of its reporting through PrecisionPoint as it can. It will then add dashboards and flash reports, such as the top five things to look at each morning.

Managing Growth

"We have gone from zero to \$50 million sales in two years, so we are growing at an incredibly rapid rate," concludes Thomson. "The combination of Microsoft Dynamics NAV, Pebblestone Fashion and PrecisionPoint will enable us to grow rapidly this year without taking on a single new accounts person, which is fantastic. Most of all, they enable us to manage that growth without costs getting out of control or customers getting unhappy."

About PrecisionPoint Software

PrecisionPoint Software is the company that simplifies and accelerates the deployment of sophisticated Business Intelligence (BI) for Microsoft® Dynamics™ customers. PrecisionPoint is a trusted and reconciled data warehouse platform for Microsoft® Dynamics™ applications including Dynamics AX, Dynamics NAV and Dynamics GP (formerly Axapta, Navision and Great Plains).

PrecisionPoint is Certified for Microsoft Dynamics NAV, Microsoft's highest standard for partner- developed software. PrecisionPoint can be installed in as little as a day and there are hundreds of end-users at companies including Americana International, Basic Chemical Solutions, BroadSoft, Chiltern Railways, Costa Coffee, Fitflop/Brand Slam, John West Foods, Koppers, IHS, Nille AS, State Garden, Inc., Vantis plc and Xaar plc.

www.Precision-Point.com

About Microsoft Dynamics

Microsoft Dynamics is a line of financial, customer relationship and supply chain management solutions that helps businesses work more effectively. Delivered through a network of channel partners providing specialized services, these integrated, adaptable business management solutions work like and with familiar Microsoft software to streamline processes across an entire business.

www.Microsoft.com/Dynamics/NAV

About Pebblestone Fashion

Since 1995, Pebblestone offers an integrated add-on based on Microsoft Dynamics® NAV, for companies in apparel, shoes, sporting goods and accessories: Pebblestone Fashion®.

A software solution that is Certified for Microsoft Dynamics NAV; a seal that proves the solution meets the highest quality standards of Microsoft.

Today, a vast network of 60 Partners provide more than 400 companies in the fashion industry worldwide with specific solutions in business process optimization. Nowadays, 6,000 people in 30 countries use Pebblestone Fashion on a daily basis. The mission of Pebblestone is to enable the fashion industry to excel in business!

www.Pebblestone.com

About Clarita Solutions

Clarita Solutions is one of the leading Microsoft Dynamics Certified Gold Partners in the UK.

Clarita are the largest reseller of Pebblestone Fashion in Europe and Pebblestone's premier business partner in the UK with Pebblestone XL status – one of only 5 partners worldwide have achieved this level. By combining Microsoft Dynamics NAV with Pebblestone Fashion, Clarita have developed a unrivalled offering for the Fashion and Apparel sector, with an ever increasing and impressive customer list.

www.ClaritaSolutions.co.uk

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