

## Case Study

## The Minivator Group



When the world's third largest stairlift manufacturer decided to make their single biggest ever investment to help them deliver superior customer service, they chose to work with Technology Management and Microsoft Dynamics.

### The brief

Employing 250 people globally, the Minivator Group is the world's third largest designer, manufacturer and supplier of stairlifts. Operating out of their Head Office and manufacturing base in Kingswinford, West Midlands, Minivator also supply bathing and public access lifting solutions throughout the U.K. They boast being the UK's second largest direct supplier to local government and, supported by their network of distributors, their US division and a direct sales operation in Bradford, they are a growing global force with big ambitions.

While the £200m global stairlift market grows at around 3 to 4 per cent each year, Minivator will grow by 14.5 per cent in 2006. Indeed, strong growth has been a trend since their management buyout in 2000. Back then Minivator delivered a £5.8m turnover; today it stands at £27.5m.

Minivator's products have a big impact on people's lives and so it is important that they offer an efficient service experience. Certainly, ongoing improvement in customer service and satisfaction is fundamental in helping Minivator to differentiate from their competitors. With this goal in mind, the Group announced 2006 as their Year of Service, where they would review their processes and investment in IT, to again maximise customer satisfaction and profitability.

### The approach

Meeting Minivator's Year of Service objectives meant committing to the single largest investment the Group had ever made. It was crucial they found a partner they could trust to deliver on the Group's ambitious plans. Simon Hardman, Minivator's Financial Director adds: 'We wanted to find someone we could partner with for the long term, who understands our business as well as technology'.

After conducting a review of their internal processes and existing IT infrastructure, key areas were identified where technology would significantly improve workflow; from order through to remittance.

Finding a partner that not only understands IT but appreciates the culture of a company with its roots in manufacturing was important to Minivator. Simon explains: 'We are a company that blends manufacturing with service. In Technology Management we found a local partner that understood us and responded in a way that we could work with to improve customer service'.

A willingness to continually improve is an important ingredient in Minivator's success and they wanted to work with a partner that shares that dynamism for change. Technology Management's approach challenges clients to drive more value from their processes and IT systems through a process of regular review meetings. Simon adds: 'We have a culture of continual innovation and change. It was important to find a partner that will look to keep pushing Minivator forward, too'.

<b>Focus</b>	Manufacturing Distribution Service
<b>Software</b>	Microsoft Dynamics NAV Microsoft Dynamics CRM Neverfail Microsoft BizTalk
<b>Hardware</b>	14 IBM xSeries Servers
<b>Users</b>	70 Dynamics NAV 50 Dynamics CRM 100 Microsoft Exchange

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*‘Over the next five years we will improve profitability by £348,000 as a result of doing this project’*

Simon Hardman, Financial Director, Minivator

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### Proposed solution

After evaluating their processes and IT infrastructure, Minivator chose to move their hosted financial and business management system, Microsoft Dynamics NAV (previously known as Microsoft Navision), in-house. The switch saves Minivator substantial costs and delivers a more flexible, integrated solution to improve customer service across the whole global business.

Moving Microsoft NAV onto Minivator’s new servers - supplied and installed by Technology Management - and making enhancements to how Minivator can use the system and report from it was a challenge for Technology Management, made easier by the software’s open and flexible architecture.

Operational reasons meant that Minivator had to switch their system over mid week. Technology Management’s team of Microsoft Certified Professionals worked throughout the night with Minivator to ensure their staff could arrive the next morning and continue to work as normal.

To support the order to remittance improvements identified in the system review, Minivator chose Microsoft Dynamics CRM for their contact and call management team. Microsoft CRM’s powerful workflow engine gave Minivator the automation they needed within the whole process. Additionally, the close integration with Microsoft Outlook 2003, the familiar Microsoft interface and the integration with their existing

Avaya phone system meant that, as Simon describes: ‘Staff would get it easily’. Technology Management’s understanding of integrating the two Microsoft Dynamics products was a big factor, too.

Minivator chose a Microsoft Finance loan to fund the whole project. Simon explains: ‘Microsoft Finance made making the decision to go ahead with the project even easier. The rate was incredibly attractive, it was a nice and easy process to apply for it and it gave us what we wanted’.

### Solution benefits

Switching from a hosted Microsoft NAV solution to one which they manage in house will have a big financial impact; Simon forecasts: ‘Over the next five years we will improve profitability by £348,000 as a result of doing this project’.

With Technology Management’s Microsoft CRM solution, Minivator can address the issues that stood in the way of them offering superior and affordable customer service. Instead of having three conflicting sources of data, there can now be a single, accurate silo of information to manage the business proactively. Instead of inefficient paper trails where the next stage in a process can’t start until the previous stage has been completed, there is automated workflow allowing many stages to work in parallel. Simon summarises the benefits succinctly: ‘We’ll have people working much more productively’.

Despite the cost of in-sourcing their system and the investment in Microsoft

CRM, Simon expects minimal impact on profit this year. Choosing to fund the project using Microsoft Finance freed up working capital that can now be invested elsewhere in the business. Simon adds: ‘Microsoft Finance made it easier to sell the vision of the IT project to the board and it will allow us to make further enhancements over the coming years’.

And finally, the new systems mean that Minivator’s dramatic growth can continue without the need for more internal staff.

### Future challenges

Choosing a scalable, integrated Microsoft platform empowers Minivator to explore exciting new ways of sharing information that will bring them ever closer to the customer and improve customer satisfaction. Web portal technologies, such as Microsoft SharePoint, present Minivator with the opportunity of sharing information that adds value to their relationship with distributors and end users.

In partnership, Minivator and Technology Management now look to tomorrow’s challenges, where each drives the other in discovering new ways of using Microsoft technology to improve profitability and customer satisfaction.



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