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Enhanced Customer Service

When the solution is fully implemented, Advanced Feed salespeople will be able to visit customers on premise and calculate the cost of feed using current data accessed from the SharePoint extranet.

“With this solution, we will be able to visit a customer’s farm and go through the whole process in one visit, because we can access all the information we need then and there.” says John. “We can schedule delivery and determine the availability of materials so customers can make their decision during that visit. It means better service for customers—and saves us a trip, as well.”

Reduced Sales Cycle

Because the Advanced Feeds salespeople will be able to gather all the necessary information to complete an estimate during the first visit to the customer’s home, they will not only save a trip in many cases, but also often shorten the sales cycle. This has the potential to increase sales volume for the company without increasing staff.

Ease of Maintenance

Windows Small Business Server also provides monitoring and reporting capabilities that Datasouth uses to remotely monitor the Advanced Feed server environment. If there are any issues with the server, Datasouth is sent alerts that enables a proactive response through remotely connecting to the server in Methven to make the required adjustments often without Advanced Feed employees knowing anything about it.

Datasouth also use Windows Server Update Services, to make sure that the Advanced Feed’s network is current with security updates. The automated updates significantly reduce the chance of unscheduled downtime and help safeguard the system from unauthorised access and malicious code.

Administrative Productivity Gains

With Windows Small Business Server, Advanced Feed has centralised all of its customer data, business data, communications, and calendaring on a single server, where it is available to all the appropriate staff both inside and outside the office. That means that the salespeople, installation coordinators, supply chain and accounting staff can access the same information at the same time, if necessary, without having to shuffle a paper job file from person to person.

The shared calendars functionality in the new system also lets everyone know where all staff members are at all times. As a result, the receptionist doesn’t have to spend time hunting for someone only to find that the person is actually out of the office. And rather than trading voice mail back and forth, the office staff will be able to use e-mail to communicate with the salespeople to get needed answers while the salespeople are out of the office.

By delivering Advanced Feed reports, core documents and business process tools through a single web based portal, and through the enabling technologies built into Microsoft Office, the complexity and time required for colleagues and partners to complete daily tasks will be greatly reduced.

The solution has provided Advanced Feed with an integrated Data Management, Business Intelligence and Information Delivery platform all through the deployment of Small Business Server 2003.

“The fact that Small Business Server had all the capability we required in one operating system and Datasouth had the expertise to implement the entire solution has meant the solution has proven to be extremely cost effective. Its satisfying to know that we have the platform to implement business improvement requirements in the future”. (John Wright – Director, Advanced Feed).

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INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY PLATFORM DELIVERS BUSINESS PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS



Advanced Feed was developed as part of a diverse farming business growing a wide range of arable crops and operating a seed processing plant. Advanced Feed utilises feed grains produced in the farming business and from other suppliers to produce formulated feed blends with other products for dairy, sheep and deer farmers in the South Island. The main growth area has been in the supply of precision blends to the booming Canterbury dairy industry.

As a successful growing company, Director John Wright quickly realised the need to increase the company’s capability through improved IT infrastructure and automated processes. The organisation had limited technology, relying on a number of PCs on a peer to peer network. Advanced Feed engaged Datasouth to recommend and provide an appropriate technology remedy. Datasouth designed and implemented a technology platform based on Microsoft Small Business Server 2003 R2.

Small Business Server 2003 R2 gives Advanced Feed a cost-effective network solution complete with shared file and print capability, e-mail, scheduling and calendars, intranet and extranet, network security capabilities, and virus protection features, in one affordable package. With the inclusion of SQL Server 2005 Work Group Edition, the ability to integrate data from legacy applications into automated reports has been provided. By utilising Windows SharePoint Services, part of the server platform in Small Business Server 2003 R2, Advanced Feed is enhancing customer service, internal operations efficiency and supply chain management.

Datasouth is an Information Technology Partner to innovative and leading businesses throughout New Zealand and Australia.

We understand Business Intelligence, Software Development, Network Infrastructure and total System Design and Support.

Through working with Datasouth, you are employing an Information Technology partner substantial enough to undertake any technology engagement.

We appreciate that the partnership with our clients is what matters, and realising the potential of this relationship enables us to understand your requirements to deliver effective business outcomes.



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Situation

Advanced Feed was experiencing substantial growth, but its limited technology resources no longer provided the support required within this growth environment.

“The company had to grow to meet demand, however our technology had reached its capacity. Our system lacked the ability to provide relevant data to sales people in the field. We lacked a central location for access to business information and creating reports for staff created inefficiencies for us”, says John.

In effect Advanced Feed’s staff held disparate silos of information and the ability to share data was limited especially for key sales people who were often away from the office.

As the company grew, administrative tasks grew as well. Management staff could be required to rebuild and resend a number of reports to external brokers. To resend the reports, employees had to collect and recompile data that was already available in the business management system but not readily accessible. This was becoming a productivity issue costing Advanced Feed 10-15 hours per month manually generating required information.

Scheduling of pickup and delivery of product and materials was also a manual task. When the salespeople left for an appointment, they kept their own system for showing where they had to be and when they would be back. This data could not be shared with other team members. It was hard for Advanced Feed’s receptionist to determine whether sales staff and management were in the office or not, or when they would be back.

In the second half of 2007, John Wright decided to do some research on how to improve his company’s productivity and in-house communication. John turned to Datasouth Business Solutions to get advice about how technology could support the ongoing growth of his company.

The key requirements that Datasouth identified for Advanced Feed included:

- Improved communications—including shared calendars and files—so that salespeople can stay in touch more effectively with customers and colleagues and avoid shuffling through stacks of paper to find answers.
- Access to information to enable salespeople to present cost information and close the sale in one customer visit.
- Improved information flow so that salespeople and partners can get the information they need quickly both in the office and when out on the road.

- Centralised data storage and scheduling, which would make information available simultaneously to all workers who need it.
- An automated solution to replace manual processes
- The solution needed to be easy to use.
- It had to be secure, only allowing access to business critical information to those that had the correct permission.
- It had to be cost effective.

Solution

To satisfy all those requirements, Datasouth implemented Microsoft Windows Small Business Server 2003 R2 Premium Edition . As a Microsoft Small Business Specialist, Datasouth proposed a solution which would take advantage of the Microsoft integrated platform.

Microsoft Windows Small Business Server 2003 R2 Premium Edition operating system provides:

- Easy network setup for centralised printing and file sharing, and provides capabilities for system backup, network security, and virus protection.
- Microsoft Exchange Server 2003 for e-mail and collaboration.
- Microsoft Windows SharePoint Services, which provides the ability to create internal team Web sites for sharing documents, calendars, and task lists and to provide information externally via an extranet to the supply chain.
- SQL Server 2005 Work Group Edition for the integration of data in legacy applications into automated reports that can be delivered in a variety of means to key stakeholders.
- The Microsoft Office Outlook 2003 messaging and collaboration client, for managing and organising e-mail messages, schedules, and contacts.
- ISA Server 2004 to facilitate publishing of Sharepoint, and Exchange services.

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Reporting Solution

Utilising SQL Server 2005 Work Group Edition, Datasouth created a customised stock tracking and supply chain management business intelligence solution using SharePoint and SQL reporting services.

Advanced Feed uses a Datasouth subsidiary, Synergy Business Solution’s software to keep track of both manufactured and raw material stock. Synergy staff made changes to the software to ensure that stock held on behalf of a broker is kept in a “store location” specific to that broker within the Synergy program. SQL Server 2005 Workgroup Edition was then used to pull data through from the Synergy database into a SQL Database. This allowed SQL reports to be created specific to the particular broker running the stock information report.

SQL Reporting Services provided Advanced Feed with stock tracking and supply chain management intelligence that could then be delivered within a reports site on the Advanced Feed’s SharePoint web portal.

“SQL’s reporting services has greatly reduced report collation and compilation time” says John.

Implementing Windows SharePoint

The SharePoint site was implemented using Windows SharePoint Services 3.0 and secured using Internet Security and Acceleration Server 2004. SharePoint gave Advanced Feed the ability to create team sites and sub sites, manage user access and rights, manage documents, and it provides an assortment of collaborative tools. The SharePoint solution also provides an information delivery platform for viewing the stock and sales reports created using SQL reporting services.

Advanced Feed staff upload important documents to the SharePoint site where they can be viewed by staff with remote access or those in the office connected to the network. Users have the ability to check out documents before editing, view documents changes, restore documents to previous versions if necessary, and administer document control and security.

Datasouth created team workspaces with document storage and retrieval features, giving users the ability to organise documents, coordinate calendars and receive important notifications and updates. Datasouth used SharePoint’s integrated security features to provide internal and external users with the correct permission levels to access approved content. Datasouth manipulated the Internet Information Services (IIS) and default settings to expose SharePoint as an extranet for the supply chain to view stock reports.

Through establishing an extranet Advanced Feed can provide

for more collaborative customer relationships. The extranet will support a new inventory management and reporting structure providing better communication at a new level of detail, with more efficient customer service. The extranet will be used to automate manual processes providing a new productivity boost and allowing for an expansion of customer services.

“SharePoint has given Advanced Feed the ability to interact with the supply chain as well as enabling our employees to easily share documents and schedule delivery through SharePoint’s calendars”, says John.

Remote Employee Access to Information

In the past, Advanced Feed had no remote access to information for key staff. With the deployment of Small Business Server 2003, remote users can now securely access email and the SharePoint extranet via the secure publishing technologies of ISA Server 2004. With the deployment of Exchange Server 2003 and ISA Server 2004, Advanced Feed now has a centralised mail delivery solution which provides a fast and efficient email system to all remote devices. Through the use of Outlook Synchronisation, Outlook Web Access and Outlook Mobile Access, management and sales staff now have access to email when away from the office via their laptops and PDA devices.

Benefits

Installing Windows Small Business Server has provided Advanced Feed with centralised access to customer and business data as well as scheduling and inventory information. This access will help to increase internal communication and productivity. By providing salespeople with this information when they are with a client the solution will help them to serve customers more efficiently and help to shorten the sales cycle. Through the provision of key stock data to the Supply Chain, the understanding of stock levels is plain to see meaning that data is pulled from the system rather than Advanced Feed staff having to push the data to the supply chain. This results in an increase in efficiency and productivity.