



Aston Martin AXcelerates

Change of ownership drove Aston Martin into an overhaul of business IT solutions which has proved its worth in improved decision making, customer understanding and business flexibility.

Aston Martin is a recognised representative of a British pedigree in hand-built, high performance sports cars. The production of these prestigious vehicles, designed and produced by skilled craftsmen, has a strong heritage and is far from a standard automotive process, and yet every Aston Martin is very much a product of today's technology.

Investment in the latest computer aided design and engineering facilities, statistical

process control and many other leading edge disciplines, including new business solutions, is ensuring that the future remains dynamic and forward thinking for Aston Martin, without jeopardising the heritage that creates aspirational demand.

Central to the continuing success of the Aston Martin business model are the capabilities of its finance and accounting system.

Out with the old and in with the new

An overhaul of Aston Martin's business infrastructure was made necessary in 2007 after the company was bought from Ford by a Middle Eastern-led consortium. This created some business issues, in particular the pressing need to source a new accounting system.

Aston Martin, which currently employs 1,300 people at three locations in the UK, created a stringent tender process to find the right solution. eBECS and Microsoft Dynamics AX were

selected over SAP on criteria of flexibility and the implementation strategy proposed. Within four months Microsoft Dynamics AX Accounting Module was up and running.

Bradley Yorke-Biggs, strategy & IT director at Aston Martin, said: "eBECS automotive experience was very important. The automotive industry is very unique, as are the challenges within it. We weren't just looking for a partner that understood the technology; we also wanted a partner that understood our specific sector, so that all they had to learn was the Aston Martin way of doing things."

Benefits to financial management and decision making

Microsoft Dynamics AX now works across all ledgers at Aston Martin: general, purchase, fixed assets and sales. While the benefits of implementing this were immediate, it took some time to identify concrete evidence. Speaking of the immediate



changes which were felt Bill Wilkins, IT manager at Aston Martin said: "When we were using our previous financial system we experienced a lot of payment rejections, which indicated that we had inaccurate or out-of-date data. After launching Microsoft Dynamics AX, this stopped immediately."

Launching a new system in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis allowed Aston Martin a level of agility to better manage many of the challenges that it faced. As trading conditions tightened, the company was able to analyse inventory and cash flow with a level of accuracy and confidence not previously experienced.

Bradley Yorke-Biggs said: "We were able to get financial data generated quickly, our cash flow management processes and aged debtors reports were rapidly processed, which was necessary when we were micro-managing cash flow issues and it gave us much greater efficiency in reporting."

Mr Yorke-Biggs says that this could not have been achieved without the new Microsoft system and that improvements gained during recession have now matured into transformed business processes. "Today, as the market improves, we still have regular finance meetings and we use the up-to-date and accurate data that the solution gives us to focus on the pressing business decisions at hand, rather than data crunching. The way in which we manage our business has changed and is more dynamic because we can rely on Microsoft Dynamics AX."

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Bill Wilkins, IT Manager, Aston Martin

The next step

As an aspirational brand, recognised throughout the world, it is essential for Aston Martin to understand the profile of its customers, ensuring current and potential vehicle owners are clearly segmented from people making more generalised enquiries.

Following business requirement analysis, and with support from eBECS, Aston Martin has decided to extend its use of the financials module and also incorporate Microsoft Dynamics AX CRM. This will allow the company to replace an unmanageable series of spreadsheets and unconnected databases, resulting in a comprehensive and fully-integrated database of contacts that can be segmented into categories of interest and ownership.

"We need to determine at an early stage with the customer whether they are 'contacting' us through the app, the website or through the dealer network," commented Yorke-Biggs. "We need to know the difference, for

example, between a 14 year old boy looking on our website for a cap for his Dad's birthday, or a One-77 customer willing to spend £1.2 million pounds on a supercar."

In 2012

Aston Martin is currently looking at options for moving some of its systems to the cloud and is evaluating Office 365. It is also in the process of undertaking a more complete implementation of Microsoft Dynamics AX in 2013.

"With the full implementation of Microsoft Dynamics AX 2012, we will have a far more accurate and resilient product structure and engineering change management environment. Currently this is a manual process but this solution will bring with it an electronic change management capability which is a big leap for us. It will improve the integrity of the system we use and affect changes to manufacturing faster, but still respect our unique engineering and manufacturing concept ." said Yorke-Biggs. **END**

ERP Connect

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The next event in this series will take place on Tuesday October 9 at Staverton Park, Daventry. See p86 for speaker insight into the conference programme.

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