Mission Almost-Impossible

Allied Electronics used Sugar On-Demand
to link legacy ERP data with the Cloud.

Allied Electronics Inc.
alliedelectronincs.com

sugarcrm

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Russ is the IT Administrator at Allied Electronics, Inc. Never heard of Allied? If you've pumped gas, you've probably met. Allied is a major parts supplier for gas stations around the world: everything from nozzles to credit card readers, from receipt paper rolls and fuel filters to intercom systems and dispenser product decals. Allied carries over 33,000 parts to keep the fuel flowing for a who's who of oil companies— Chevron, Hess, Citgo, BP, Texaco, Shell, Exxon, Costco, Pilot, and many more, both in the US and overseas.

Allied also integrates the different hardware and software at gas stations using its popular NeXGen Forecourt Controller, a device which removes much of the "heavy lifting" for a point-of-sale by managing the strenuous communication demands of fuel dispensers, card readers, leak detection systems, car wash controllers, electronic price signs, and other devices. Allied works constantly with customers and vendors to meet the demands of today's convenience-store environment. This includes software that allows for loyalty programs in the form of price-per-gallon discounts at the pump, custom display prompts at the dispenser card reader, and Ethernet capabilities that allow for remote troubleshooting and diagnostics.

Thinking Forward

Allied is just starting to develop strategic plans for using reports to drive more sales. Looking forward, as the fuel industry creates more green and competitive-marketing initiatives, Allied plans to use their new system more and more heavily.

"We now have the capability to do traditional mailings and emails within SugarCRM," said Russ. We're looking forward to creating marketing newsletters and email campaigns in the future. W-Systems will help us with that project. We're also looking forward to the Q3 release of Sugar's newest version with html coding for faster screen refresh times."

It's a small business of less than thirty people. Business is good— but Allied wanted to focus on expanding revenues in two specific ways: customer retention and increased parts sales.

"Everybody has rich information in our accounting system— but our sales staff wanted to look at sales by customer or by product. Could they get reports on who had a particular brand of gas pump, and promote parts to them? If suppliers expected a price increase, could they run specials in advance? We wanted to create a system that would offer the sales team that kind of information. Knowing who was buying what meant that we could market more effectively to customers."

W-Systems

Learn more at www.w-systems.com

Allied also wanted to focus on knowing when customers stopped purchasing. "We weren't doing a very good job of following up with customers. The internet has driven competitive pricing more and more. If one of our customers stops buying, it's one of two reasons: either they're buying from a competitor, or they're putting off upgrades that help business run better. Being aware of purchasing 'gaps' offers us sales opportunities. Once again, all signs pointed that we really needed to get our accounting information into a CRM where we could use it for marketing."

SugarCRM versus ACT! and Salesforce

Allied had had experience with ACT! contact management software, but didn't feel it was the right tool for their sales staff. "We wanted a Cloud CRM so we could focus on marketing and not maintenance. With two offices (Bristol, PA and San Diego, CA) and limited staff, we didn't want to have to upgrade software when new builds came out. And with global sales, we wanted to have access anywhere," Russ related. "We looked at Salesforce.com, but it had some limitations and we weren't crazy about the pricing. SugarCRM seemed to be a better fit all around. It offered a better price and more importantly, SugarCRM was more open to customization for importing data and getting reports back out."

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Cloud System via Cloud Service

An interesting aspect to this project is that the entire thing took place in the Cloud. Chris and Russ never actually met during the entire project, because everything was done over the phone and the internet.

"We finally met face-to-face at SugarCon this year, at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York." Was the meeting what he expected? "Actually, yes," laughed Russ. "I used to work with an engineer whose voice was very much like Chris Wettre's, so I always pictured Chris looking like him. The funny thing is, he really did!"

Asked if he'd recommend SugarCRM and W-Systems, Russ responded with an enthusiastic yes. "Especially because W-Systems was so easy to work with. They stayed in budget and stayed in the project time frame. They know what they're doing. It was a very well managed project."

Tech Tidbit: More about REST

Representational State Transfer (REST) is a style of software architecture which had emerged as a predominant web API design model. REST facilitates the transaction between web servers by allowing loose coupling between different services. REST is less strongly typed than its counterpart, SOAP. The REST language uses nouns and verbs, and has an emphasis on readability. Unlike SOAP, REST does not require XML parsing and does not require a message header to and from a service provider. This ultimately uses less bandwidth. REST error handling also differs from that used by SOAP. Predominantly, use of SOAP is to invoke behaviors while REST invokes information.