



Methodical attention to process underpins ERP implementation at SEMA™

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In the last 25 years Australia's mailing industry has undergone tremendous change. Once almost unknown, direct mailing is now a mainstream corporate activity. Embraced by marketers it also provides a solution to the production and distribution of bulk corporate documents such as invoices and statements. Mailing insertions are now described as "intelligent"; their inclusion in an envelope dependent on postcode, buying habits or other criteria maintained in the corporate database. It's an industry that has evolved with technology and throughout, SEMA has been one of the leaders.

Established in 1980 under the name SecurityMail, the company has grown from a small two-person operation to become an organisation of almost 700 employees with annual revenues of \$100 million. It provides an end-to-end communication delivery service through its five lines of business: business process outsourcing; business transformation services; IT services; business process re-engineering; and direct marketing services.

Integrated ERP

In 2004 SEMA's long-serving technology infrastructure was showing its age. According to Brent McCulloch, executive director, SEMA, "we were running a number of disparate in-house built applications that had served us well over time but they were beginning to be less than robust. The problem was that they were never configured for the quantity and type of business that we had grown into. We'd outgrown our systems."

Deciding that an integrated ERP solution offered the right capabilities for future growth, SEMA's management began investigating alternatives. After a competitive evaluation process they selected the market-leading software suite, Microsoft Dynamics AX™, and appointed Moore Stephens Technology Australia (MSTA) as implementation partner.



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- Technical Expertise
- Implementation
- Project Management
- Management Consultancy
- Change Management
- Risk Management
- Training and Ongoing Support

A process-driven approach

Given the importance of the ERP system to SEMA's operations, the implementation began with a thorough review of SEMA's processes. Before any code was cut, MSTA visited each of SEMA's offices, examining business processes and requirements. McCulloch continues, "After that MSTA led a number of workshops to analyse our business. We looked at the processes as they were, before moving on to define the processes that we wanted to move to - the ones that would help take costs out of our business. As we had been running independent systems at each different site, just mapping the current processes was a huge task.

"It required a lot of soul searching to come up with a solution that would work across all offices. I think one of the main benefits that MSTA offered was that they brought a fresh set of eyes. Many of our people have been here a long time and were used to their own tailored solution. Just by continually asking "why?" MSTA helped us to come up with a national approach. I don't know that we could have done it without an outsider."

McCulloch believes that part of the workshops' success was that they gave SEMA a glimpse into what could be achieved with Microsoft Dynamics AX. The other benefit was that the workshops included representation from all areas of the business. It meant that the sales department, for example, was able to provide input into production processes. "The result was a very constructive discussion about the best ways to meet client expectations as well as our own business needs."

Once the future processes had been agreed and documented MSTA began work on the physical software implementation. Financial management, the warehouse and production were the first cabs off the rank. Typical of any implementation of this size - particularly in a complex industry - there were occasional hiccups, but McCulloch is quick to point out, "We've enjoyed great direction from MSTA and good assistance whenever we've been off the rails."

Software for a complex business

Four years down the track, Microsoft Dynamics AX is the ERP system successfully underpinning approximately 75 per cent of SEMA's business. A limited number of small business areas have yet to be considered for Microsoft Dynamics AX, as they continue to operate effectively on their existing software.

MSTA continues to be SEMA's Microsoft Dynamics AX partner of choice, providing proactive support and advice. McCulloch credits the longevity of relationship to MSTA's expertise in the ERP application and to their ability to apply that knowledge to SEMA's business. "MSTA has always had a good team of specialists looking after us. With their continual involvement and assistance Microsoft Dynamics AX has progressed to handling SEMA's core integrated transactions in a complex, fast paced, unpredictable, demanding and highly competitive business segment."

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