COMPASSLEARNING

Case Study

Education Technology Leader Controls Business, Streamlines Finance with Cloud-Based ERP

COMPANY PROFILE

CompassLearning provides K-12 curriculum and educational management technology solutions to school districts, charter schools, and private schools across the United States.

CHALLENGE

When the corporate owners sold the company, CompassLearning lost access to the financial management system and business infrastructure and had only three months to find replacements.

SOLUTION

CompassLearning engaged SMB Suite to implement an integrated cloud-based solution with Microsoft Dynamics GP, completing the project long before the deadline.

BENEFITS

• Gain powerful information protection and uncompromised solution availability

• Generate significant financial savings

• Boost financial management efficiencies by 25 percent

• Support growth and change management

CompassLearning, a provider of curriculum software, had just three months to move to a financial management solution after the owners sold the company. The company's leaders had goals for the flexibility, cost-efficiency, and dependability of the new software and wanted to avoid investing in a new infrastructure. SMB Suite's cloud-based solution integrating financials and sales on the Microsoft Dynamics platform offered both the functionality Compass demanded, and an unbeatable speed of deployment, beating the deadline by weeks.

CompassLearning increased efficiencies in finance by 25 percent and replaced unpredictable, corporate IT charges with a low, monthly expense, also reducing costs. The integrated cloud-based solution is highly flexible in supporting changing business requirements and the company's growth. Already, CompassLearning is extending the group of users and using Microsoft Dynamics GP and SMB Suite to help manage business activities.

SMB SUITE

Situation

The founders of CompassLearning started the company in 1969 with the conviction that computers and technology could help individualize the learning process. Since then, CompassLearning has worked with more than 20,000 schools across the United States, serving more than 11 million K-12 students. The company is headquartered in Austin, Texas, and has approximately 250 employees in locations throughout the country.

CompassLearning's flagship product, CompassLearning Odyssey, offers curricula for personalized, differentiated instruction that gives students with different learning styles and levels of accomplishment a way to remain engaged and learning. Odyssey also provides assessments, helps instructors identify and assist students who struggle academically, and features comprehensive reporting capabilities for instructors and school district managers. More than 5,000 school districts throughout the United States use Odyssey as their core or supplementary curriculum.

The Readers' Digest Association, CompassLearning's parent company, decided to spin off its subsidiary, selling it to a private equity firm. In the process, CompassLearning lost access to the corporate business infrastructure and several key business systems, including Oracle enterprise resource planning (ERP) software, which CompassLearning's financial team used to record, report, and manage its finances. CompassLearning had a transition period of three months, during which it could still use the Oracle system, even though it had already changed ownership.

> " We can accelerate our work, because the solution is very easy to use. On average, financial processes today are 25% faster and more efficient than they used to be. "
>
> - Chip Pate, Director of Finance, CompassLearning

Detailed, meaningful financial reporting and visibility was important to CompassLearning managers. However,

SMB SUITE

CompassLearning frequently required assistance from the corporate IT group in generating financial reports. The parent company invoiced CompassLearning for reporting help and other support. The charges were significant and generally unpredictable, so it was not easy to plan for them, and CompassLearning hoped to avoid such costs in a solution it would be able to control.

Business leaders decided to use the software replacement as an opportunity to acquire technology that was a better fit with how the company worked and how it wanted to grow. Chip Pate, Director of Finance at CompassLearning, explains, "Oracle was not intuitive; people found it difficult to learn. We wanted a solution that our people would quickly become familiar and comfortable with. We wanted to gain the ability to support acquisitions the company was going to make." CompassLearning also hoped to have better control over the new solution than it had over Oracle.

In addition, information protection and the security of confidential financial data were critical for CompassLearning leadership. Says Pate, "Most of the executives leaned toward a solution that we would deploy and manage in our facility, because they felt it was more secure than a hosted implementation. However, we also had to weigh the staffing and infrastructural costs of an on-premises deployment."

Solution

A software selection team at CompassLearning reviewed a large number of possible ERP and financial management solutions, inviting demonstrations from promising vendors. When team members learned about Microsoft Dynamics GP, they felt they had a strong match between their needs and the capabilities of the software.

"Microsoft Dynamics GP had all the functionality we sought, but, as an ERP system, it also offered a lot more," says Pate. "At the same time, it didn't present the high costs and administrative complexities of much larger solutions."

CompassLearning felt even stronger about Microsoft Dynamics GP after making contact with SMB Suite, a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner located in the Dallas, Texas, metropolitan area. SMB Suite offers a cloud-based solution that builds on

Microsoft Dynamics GP and provides and provides prepackaged, integrated capabilities that include collaboration and content sharing through Microsoft SharePoint Server and easy online meetings with Microsoft Office Live Meeting. Matthew Woodward, President, SMB Suite, says, "We felt that we would be a great fit for CompassLearning because it required no capital outlay, which was perfect for an organization with very little time to implement a new ERP offering. What's more, SMB Suite includes round-the-clock support at no additional cost -- a big convenience for a company that has to ramp up quickly and train employees on new technology.

SMB Suite made a compelling case for a cloud-based solution that integrated Microsoft Dynamics GP and provided a fixed-scope bid for the data migration and solution implementation. In addition, SMB Suite impressed CompassLearning with the information protection and data and application security available through the cloud offering and the secure cloud data center.

Once CompassLearning decided on this integrated cloud-based solution, SMB

Suite consultants worked with company stakeholders to gain a deep understanding of the business and define the solution requirements. SMB Suite completed the data migration from the Oracle system and the implementation of Microsoft Dynamics GP and SMB Suite almost a month before the cutoff date when CompassLearning would lose access to the Oracle system. The entire process only took approximately six weeks. To facilitate this rapid deployment, SMB Suite used its own project methodology and best practices for smooth, fast implementations, proven in many previous projects. A major milestone in the technology transition was a three-day training that SMB Suite performed; this training also served to validate the solution configuration and produced buy-off from CompassLearning. As an additional layer of information protection to the data availability, SMB Suite provides CompassLearning with a disk backup of the company's data every month. With Microsoft Dynamics GP secured in the cloud through SMB Suite, all users access the solution conveniently through their web browsers. To start with, the solution became available for a dozen members of

CompassLearning's financial management team. When CompassLearning became more familiar with the capabilities and opportunities that Microsoft Dynamics GP presented, the company decided to expand the group of users to 25.

SMB Suite also integrated Microsoft Dynamics GP and CompassLearning's customer relationship management (CRM) system to streamline the process of providing sales quotes. CompassLearning also expects to manage inventory, order processing, purchasing, and at least some invoicing by using the solution. The implementation also included the multicompany and intercompany functionality of Microsoft Dynamics GP, which CompassLearning expects to use intensely in managing acquisitions and moving data and management functions from one company's systems to Microsoft Dynamics GP.

Business managers at CompassLearning rely extensively on the reporting capabilities of Microsoft Dynamics GP. The solution surfaces data to Microsoft FRx, the financial reporting and analysis application, to automatically generate a number of reports designed to meet CompassLearning's

needs for financial control and business insight. From Microsoft FRx, it's easy to import data and reports to Microsoft Excel for further analysis.

In reviewing the experience in working with SMB Suite and the new cloud-based business management solution, Pate summarizes, "The capabilities of Microsoft Dynamics GP match or surpass what we were able to accomplish with the Oracle system, but we now have full control of the solution. SMB Suite did outstanding work in completing the implementation project even before our fast-approaching deadline and continues to provide strong support in extending the solution's value for more people in the company, with additional capabilities."

Benefits

For CompassLearning, moving to a cloud-based ERP solution within a very short deadline was a significant achievement, but it was also just the beginning of a successful, productive technology experience. Pate comments, "The more we work with Microsoft Dynamics GP and SMB Suite in the cloud, the more we find ways to use the

SMB SUITE

solution effectively. We will continue to increase the value we experience from it."

Gain Powerful Information Protection and Uncompromised Solution Availability

Today, CompassLearning benefits from a robust, dependable, enterprise-level infrastructure with excellent information protection and application availability. "We did not have a business infrastructure when we left our parent company, and neither did we want to commit to the expense and time involved in creating one," says Pate. "Instead, we enjoy the advantages of the outstanding security and business continuity capabilities of our integrated cloud-based solution."

Generate Significant Financial Savings

Going with a cloud-based ERP solution has generated substantial cost savings for CompassLearning. For one, there is no need to increase staffing. Says Pate, "Bringing the solution in-house would have forced us to boost the administrative resources in our IT department, an investment we managed to avoid."

CompassLearning now pays a firmly set, affordable, monthly fee for its cloud-based software services, which include clearly

> " The more we work with Microsoft Dynamics GP and SMB Suite in the cloud, the more we find ways to use the solution effectively. We will continue to increase the value we experience from it. "
>
> - Chip Pate, Director of Finance, CompassLearning

defined support services from SMB Suite. "Instead of unpredictable, high charges from a corporate IT group, we now pay a fixed, reasonable amount every month. Because of the erratic nature of the charges we incurred in the past, it's hard to make an accurate comparison, but I estimate that our technology-related costs have gone down by $10,000 per year."

Boost Financial Management Efficiencies by 25 Percent

Following the implementation of the integrated cloud-based solution, CompassLearning has realized significant efficiencies in financial and business management. "We can accelerate our work, because the solution is very easy to use," says Pate. "On average, financial processes today are 25 percent faster and more efficient than they used to be."

SMB SUITE

Examples of faster workflows in financial management include closing the books at the end of the month, financial reporting to the executive team and board of directors, and external reporting. Automated reports facilitated through Microsoft FRx have helped remove delays and deadline pressures from financial reporting. In the field, sales representatives no longer need to access an add-in to the company's CRM system to provide customer quotes. Instead, they use Microsoft Dynamics GP in a streamlined process, which enables customers to receive their quotes much sooner than in the past.

Support Growth and Change Management

Business managers at CompassLearning can configure Microsoft Dynamics GP to the company's requirements in ways that they were unable to do with the previous system. For example, they can easily adjust credit approval limits and keep customer transactions moving. "It's not just that we do not need to wait for approvals from a parent company anymore," states Pate. "Because of the high flexibility of our integrated cloud-based solution, we can adjust it to how we like to work. We can reflect our policies within it and make adjustments on the fly. In consequence, we have become much more nimble."

Since moving to the cloud with Microsoft Dynamics GP and SMB Suite, CompassLearning has already acquired one company and relied on the solution to support the transition of information and technologies. The future will bring further expansion. "As we continue to grow, the ability of Microsoft Dynamics GP to accommodate more complex business needs and more demanding workloads will be critical," says Pate. "This is something we all look forward to."

For more information on our solutions, visit www.smbsuite.com.

SMB SUITE