Alithya

CASE STUDY

THE WILLS GROUP
Retail

"We are leveraging Microsoft's entire stack to help drive digital transformation for the Wills Group – Azure, Microsoft Dynamics ERP and CRM, SQL, Power BI, Outlook, and Skype. It just made a lot of sense to standardize the products and get the benefits of flexibility, integration, ease of use, and support with Microsoft products."

Paul Nicholson, IT Director

The Wills Group. headquartered in La Plata, MD, is a privately held holding company that provides customers retail, convenience, and home comfort solutions. It is comprised of multiple businesses including retail convenience stores, fueling stations, fuels supply and logistics, and heating and cooling services. The various brands operated by the Wills Group include: SMO Energy, Dash In Food Stores, Splash In and SMO Motor Fuels.

The Wills Group embarked on a digital transformation to support their aggressive growth and business expansion strategy. Their highly restrictive and outdated legacy business application systems were hindering their ability to grow the company and enter new markets. The clunky, customized system required reworking every time the company implemented a new go-to-market strategy, which led to a search for a flexible ERP system that could handle changing their different business models. Their ERP system needed to give them a foundation to adjust as they grow, providing as much data as possible for management to make decisions quickly. After reviewing typical major ERP players, The Wills Group decided that Microsoft Dynamics AX 2012 was the best fit.

Key Benefits

> Automation of manual processes

> Relevant and agile reporting and dashboards

> Ability to process massive volumes of purchase and sales orders daily from retail locations

> Adaptability and extensibility of Dynamics ERP meet the evolving demands of the business

> Implementation of a world class enterprise business application foundation provided means to enter into the new business channel of retail

> Reduced growth in staff required to meet the demands of business expansion

> User adoption and training with familiar user interfaces

The Wills Group also chose to implement Power BI with Alithya's Data Management framework, to better understand their data sourced from one single version of truth. Power BI is able to pull from their ERP system in addition to other systems that are used in their day-to-day business, such as a pricing system and a delivery system.

Alithya's collaborative style, partnered with The Wills Group's strong internal team was a winning approach. The Wills Group required many integrations from various systems and partners, and Alithya leveraged their deep expertise to develop the required connections.

According to Nicholson, "It has been a really great platform in terms of helping us to continue to automate processes as our business changes. We can tweak our automated process to accept changes and then just turn it on and let it run." The use of Dynamics AX 2012 has allowed them to covert over 100 wholesale locations into retail controlled locations in just 3 years.

The Wills Group also partnered with Alithya to implement a data management foundation to support line of business reporting and analytics in the cloud with Power BI. This analytics solution has driven tremendous visibility and value to the business. Alithya also assisted The Wills Group with its data literacy program by developing custom training modules for their Power BI analytics solutions.

Taking the Complexity Out

The Wills Group found that Alithya was able to understand their business problems and how to solve them through the Dynamics AX 2012 platform. AX is an enterprise ERP system, covering a broad range of business functions and capabilities. "It was impressive that the Alithya team was able to take the complexity out of it and come up with really good solutions." said Nicholson. On the Power BI side, Nicholson continued, "It was imperative to have someone like Alithya in place. It is really exciting to think about how quickly Microsoft is innovating, but it also means that as soon as you think you have a great solution, they update it and make it better, and you have to redo your solution. Being able to handle that change quickly is a challenge and they really helped us through that."

A Single Version of the Truth

As the Wills Group had many sources of data, the company was challenged with finding a single truth. Their ultimate goal in bringing in Alithya's BI Accelerator was to not only pull data from Dynamics, but also from systems used in their day-to-day business. When these other sources were fed into Dynamics, they were fed in a summary fashion. This meant that their exposure to the data and how individuals in the company could report on the data could be very different.

The Wills Group then leveraged Power BI to deliver front-end analytics used by managers across their corporate and remote retail locations. The implementation of their BI solution has unlocked data and provides new actionable insights.

Microsoft Solutions Leveraged

Azure – Moving all internet-facing systems into Azure, which simplifies architecture, provides better reporting, and saves money.

> Office M365 – Office 365 with Windows licensing included
> Microsoft Dynamics AX 2012 R3
> CRM
> Power BI
> Alithya's BI Accelerator

Training Curriculum

The Alithya team has developed end user training videos to educate users and drive data literacy throughout The Wills Group. It was vital for the users to not only understand how to use it, but to truly comprehend why they need it, how it fits into the vision of the company, and how they expect the users to interact with it daily.

Alithya's Breadth of Knowledge

According to Nicholson, "Alithya has a large breadth of knowledge across multiple domains of Microsoft. It has been nice to have a business partner who I can work with on each of my Microsoft products who helps to get our projects up and running through to a resolution. Whenever I have been in touch with their leadership team, I am able to provide feedback and then see results based upon that feedback. They are certainly receptive to all of my concerns and are looking to help us drive our business. In addition, Alithya was able to keep to ambitious timelines and hit their numbers consistently."

"ALITHYA DELIVERED EVERYTHING THAT WE NEEDED WHEN WE NEEDED IT. THEY BROUGHT IN PEOPLE WHO WERE ABLE TO HAVE DIFFERENT CONVERSATIONS IN DIFFERENT WAYS TO COME UP WITH THE RIGHT SOLUTIONS."

– Paul Nicholson