



Chef Middle East Implements Microsoft Dynamics AX

About Chef Middle East

With five sites spread around the Middle East including Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Muscat, Doha and Umm Al Quwain. Chef Middle East is a rapidly growing regional food distribution company. It has experienced rapid growth in the past couple of years, spurred on by new contact wins. The company was founded in 1995 and supplies the hotel, airline and shipping industries. It also claims to be one of the biggest importers of food in the United Arab Emirates.

Industry

Food Distribution

Country or Region

United Arab Emirates

Customer Size

100 employees

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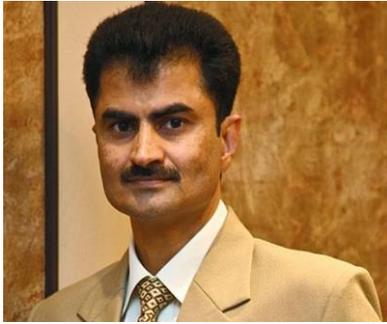
www.chefmiddleeast.com

“We didn’t really have what you would call a true ERP system. We had software that performed many of the functions that the ERP system does-mainly through our accounting software-but we didn’t have a through and through ERP system.”

Satheesh A Nair, IT Manager, Chef Middle East

After years of rapid growth, Dubai-based Chef Middle East needed an ERP system that would manage its business and wouldn’t demand major network upgrades. The company turned to Microsoft for the system it needed.

One of the most common reasons a business fails is because its IT systems failed to grow with it. Chef Middle East was determined it wouldn’t be next. The lack of a true ERP system was hampering the plans that management had set out for the company. As such, it fell upon the IT department to look for one that would match the requirements of the business. “Despite pressure from above, we were keen not to jump into the first solution we found, get stuck and then not go anywhere.” says



Satheesh A Nair, IT
Manager, Chef Middle East

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the IT manager. So we decided to get the basics right first and then move onto the more complicated, but powerful things an ERP system allows. We eventually settled on Microsoft Dynamics because it was the one that- from what our research told us- best suited our requirements.

However, just because it was the best fit, that didn’t mean that, there weren’t issues for the company. We were moving from simple accounting software to a fully-fledged ERP system. It was a big jump and that’s why we wanted to take it slowly. We couldn’t afford any mistakes. We focused on integrating Microsoft Dynamics into one single part of our business- partly because we didn’t want to raise expectations of what the software could do and then disappoint because it didn’t do what we’d promised.

Many of the things the company was planning to use the ERP for were intended for simply and streamline the business’s five offices. “Our systems were run separately in each location”, says Nair. It was the same software but they weren’t linked with each other. Dubai had its own server, Abu Dhabi had its own and so on.

We basically wanted the connectivity, management and the stock management capabilities of an ERP solution, because with our business, if stock levels go below a dangerous level, then we have problems. As it was, there was no way for us to develop trends across the company, at least not without time consuming research.

However, it wasn’t only Chef Middle East that was to benefit from the introduction of Microsoft Dynamics. “Our customers too have seen the results of the integration. As a food company expiry dates are very important”, says Nair. So we wanted that to be tracked too, so that we

could ensure that we are giving the customer the correct expiry date, even after the product has left us.

However as Nair explains, the implementation of Microsoft Dynamics as the company's new ERP was only a small part of the overall the company underwent. "The separate servers had led to a situation where the product codes were different within the company" he says.

"We're still a growing company, while cost was an obvious attraction of Dynamics; we had to ensure the solution we went with would allow us to grow"

- Satheesh A Nair

To give you an example in Dubai, Lipton's Ice Tea was "B", while the same product, the same box, even the same number of pieces per box in Abu Dhabi was labelled as "C". The situation was similar at our other sites too. That careful approach to slowly integrating the ERP into the business meant the biggest problem the IT department came across was the issue of training.

"We have around 50 users in total who interact with the software. Of that number, around 35 to 40 of our staff are considered constant users", says Nair. That many users presented the company with a logistical headache when it came to training. Luckily for the company, however, the user friendliness of the solution meant that the biggest challenge most people had with adapting to the new software wasn't a technical issue.

"The biggest hurdle was getting people used to the idea that Microsoft Dynamics brought in business processes. With the old software, people weren't necessarily following any processes or workflows", says Nair.

Maintaining those business processes is one of the main focal point for the IT department, according to Nair. Unlike many rollouts, the company deliberately chose to eschew heavy customization of the solution.

We avoided customization partly because of costs, but also because if in two or three years we needed to upgrade to a new version of dynamics or any other solution, that customization would only create headaches. It's certainly not the main reason why we avoided customizing it, but it's certainly one of the biggest benefits looking down the line in terms of management of our IT infrastructure and assets.

We had originally given ourselves five months to integrate it and roll it out. However, we managed to complete it within just four months and at last launched it at our offices in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Umm al-Quwain and Muscat on the same day, while our Doha office went live shortly after.

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