

## Using Microsoft Dynamics to keep on trucking

After two false-starts with other platforms, Peel Truck and Trailer turned to Microsoft partner EC Advance to integrate its IT processes

4/7/2008 11:15:00 AM

by Jeff Jedras

After implementing an accounting software package that just duplicated paper processes and an industry-specific solution that just wasn't up to the task, Dennis Di Franco finally found what he was looking for with a [Microsoft Dynamics NAV](#)-based solution from partner [EC Advance](#).

Di Franco is the controller of Mississauga, Ont.-based [Peel Truck & Trailer Equipment Inc.](#) (PT&T) and a newly-created subsidiary business, [Innovative Trailer Design Industries](#) (ITD). PT&T was founded in 1971 and specializes in truck and trailer repair, while ITD manufactures mobile expandable facilities designed to fold for transport by truck. They can be used by trade schools, for example, as a mobile training facility.

The companies have 95 employees in Mississauga and do business across Canada and the U.S., and on the technology front Di Franco says they initially used a "big-box accounting package" for job tracking, parts inventory, billing and financials.

"Really all it did was transfer paper and pen process into a computerized invoice, and we really were doubling the work," said Di Franco. "We would still record the daily job activity on paper, and translate it to the computer to produce an invoice."

Not satisfied with that solution, he says the company's owner came across an industry-specific solution that came with "a lot of promises" and was sold as their total solution. The owner was gung-ho and pulled the trigger, but during live implementation Di Franco says it quickly became apparent the solution couldn't handle the volume of data necessary.

That's when Di Franco turned to EC Advance, a Mississauga, Ont.-based solution provider and Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, which recommended a Dynamics NAV-based solution from [Microsoft](#) (NASDAQ: [MSFT](#)). Di Franco adds the partner advised building a custom solution from scratch would be lengthy, expensive, and not the way to go.

"When I saw the solid framework (of Dynamics) and that we had the flexibility to do different things, we started looking it and pricing out the perfect system," said Di Franco.

After balancing his needs with his wants, Di Franco says he worked with EC Advance to design a system that went live in November of 2006 and completely automates the job process, linking customer billing to parts procurement and employee time tracking. The most telling sign of the system's success, he says, has been the silence.

"After it went live I pretty much sat there and waited, and when you don't hear anything it's always a good thing," said Di Franco. "I haven't heard anything for the last year and a half."

The system has made a number of differences for the company, says Di Franco. By knowing which parts are needed and when, inventory can be kept down. By analyzing statistics to see which mechanics perform certain tasks faster, staff can be more efficiently assigned. And with customer purchase orders linked to job cards, customer billing is fair, accurate and fast, with more detailed explanations behind it.

“This is what we needed, and it's what we dreamed of,” said Di Franco. “It's what we expected from the other software, but just never got.”

The once bitten, twice shy feeling caused by that earlier failed implementation was one of the challenges to overcome working with PT&T says Reno Capano, CEO of EC Advance. They had to show that the technology could be a benefit to their business.

“They're not the most technologically-adaptive industry, and that was probably one of the biggest challenges when we started working together,” said Capano. “We walked very carefully and cautiously to recommend a solution that would not only address their immediate needs, but adapt and grow as their business needs change.”

They needed a system for jobs and job analysis by customer, to determine which jobs and customers were more profitable. They also needed better visibility into the business for their administration people, says Capano, to allow them to reassign staff based on shifting priorities.

EC Advance recommended Microsoft Dynamics, says Capano, because it provides a platform to grow as the business moves into new business areas, as well as the flexibility for customization for specific business needs.

PT&T's Di Franco says working with EC Advance he was impressed by how they had a staffer that specialized in every relevant area, adding he also liked their hands-on approach.

“It's done face to face, not on the phone,” said Di Franco. “They come into your office, walk around with you and get a feel for your operation. That was essential for me.”

That hands-on, on the ground approach is a key part of how EC Advance does business, and achieves success, says Capano.

“Understanding a company's business, and not just from a debits and credits perspective, (is important),” said Capano. “Understanding process, understanding the need for integration with various legacy systems, and understanding the ability to incorporate the existing business processes that may need to be changed.”

Di Franco is currently working with EC Advance on what he calls phase 1.5 of the project, which will involve wireless [Windows CE](#) handhelds for each job, integrated into the company's payroll system.