

## CASE STUDY

# CONTINENTAL MILLS Food Manufacturing

"We spent a significant amount of time reflecting inward to understand our processes and what we really wanted out of technology. We conducted a thorough review of all options, but as a Microsoft house, Microsoft Dynamics 365 was the right choice. It allows customizations and provides compatibility across various tools. Alithya then brought in a unique point of difference with their process of adapting D365 to our needs."

[Steve Woodside, Director - Foodservice Marketing & Sales Operations](#)



**Continental Mills** is a leading foodservice baking mix manufacturer who maintains category captain status across leading foodservice distributors, representing over 80% of the industry's volume. They are a Seattle-based family-owned business, started in 1932. With brands such as Krusteaz Professional, Ghirardelli licensed baking mixes, a wide portfolio of private label brands and a deep proprietary national account portfolio, their products are enjoyed across the country by millions of people when dining out.

The Continental Mills Foodservice Division is a sales-driven organization, with over 80% of the personnel operating in some form of sales capacity. Their culture places significant emphasis on the development of sustainable customer relationships at the local and regional level. Their go to market sales model requires successful coordination across a direct sales team, broker representation of 600+ people in 52 market locations, the appropriate operator customer base from a pool of 1.4m locations and 2,000 distributor partners. They needed a tool that could handle their needs.

## Key Benefits

- > Improved visibility to address sales and marketing opportunities or problems
- > Microsoft based company – integration with D365, SharePoint, Teams, Power BI, Outlook, LinkedIn
- > Enhanced reporting with Power BI dashboards
- > Completed on time, under estimate

Continental Mills had previously launched a CRM system, but found after 4 years, it no longer met their needs. While their previous partner did their best, Continental Mills found it necessary to move towards a new CRM platform.

After conducting a detailed internal review, Continental Mills defined their Sales processes in 10 key areas, which include:

- Account/Contact Management and the Customer Profile
- Opportunity and Sales Pipeline Management
- Activity Management including Outlook Integration
- Marketing Management: Field Sales Marketing
- Marketing Management: Corporate Marketing
- Lead Management for Marketing
- Mobile
- Views and Dashboards
- Reports and Analytics
- Unique Tools: Product Catalog

This took a significant amount of time as they reflected inward to understand their processes and then to understand based on those processes what they really wanted out of technology. According to Steve Woodside, Director - Foodservice Marketing & Sales Operations, "We found a platform able to support our processes and enable sales."

Continental Mills operates with a philosophy of integrating people, process, and technology to maximize relationships with customers and they knew it was time to search for a new solution that would be better adopted by their team.

## The Need for New Technology

Unsure of their technology options, they started with an RFP. They reviewed Microsoft, Salesforce, and their provider at the time. A key requirement of the RFP was an onsite presentation at their headquarters with an internal project team and a steering team.

There was also broad awareness across multiple functions in the company and the executive team. Per Woodside, "It was necessary as a cornerstone style project. It was getting a lot of attention and focus in order to make sure we got it right."

While Continental Mills is a Microsoft based company, it did not limit them from understanding all their options. They found Microsoft Dynamics 365 was the leading choice in many ways. For example, one of the key functional core requirements was Outlook integration. Dynamics 365 and Salesforce differ greatly in how that works. The Salesforce solution is not as fully integrated in the way that the Dynamics 365 system works. According to Woodside, "The two really can't be compared in our opinion."

They also found Dynamics 365 to be the right fit based on multiple other reasons. Not only does it fit in nicely with Continental Mills' enterprise solution, it also allows for customizations and compatibility across multiple software tools. The links between SharePoint, Teams, and Power BI were huge for them. "Our ability to review, dashboard, and connect with Power BI and utilize that tool has been one of the key enablers and will provide long-term benefits for us. It is an area we can point to as a return on our investment." They also found the direct connectivity to LinkedIn to be a point of difference.

Continental Mills anticipates the Dynamics 365 CRM system will deliver the following results: a more efficient direct selling team – their most valuable and expensive resource, improved closure rates, enhanced collaboration/deeper customer relationships, and ongoing sales growth. Since their go-live in December 2019, they have seen improved operator visibility, better reporting with enhanced Power BI dashboards, and can track to improve visibility and drive early conversations around opportunities and problems. They assume that they will also see closure rates improve based on enhanced tools, a standardized approach, and the early visibility to performance/problems as well as the processes and technology will deliver on volume expectations.

## Working with Alithya

Continental Mills was introduced to Alithya by their contact at Microsoft. Per Woodside, "Quite frankly, we feel fortunate that it happened. We found a partner in Alithya pretty quickly."

Alithya got involved with Continental Mills at the time of the RFP. According to Woodside, "From the very beginning, I would say the Alithya team separated themselves from the other providers. What truly separated Alithya, was their analysis of the RFP document, the review of the core functional requirements that we outlined in the RFP, the questions they asked during the time period that we had for the RFP to qualify, etc."

Woodside continues, "Our RFP was extremely thorough. It took us years in developing our sales processes, understanding, analyzing, surveying ourselves, really asking our questions, going in depth across each of the different functional requirements we needed, and working with a third party partner. From the very beginning, Alithya showed a point of difference in understanding and dedication to what we wrote. And rather than trying to change the functional requirements, Alithya began to adapt the software and talk about how the software could support them."

Once starting the project with Alithya, things only got better. According to Woodside, "The Alithya team is best in class. That is not something just felt across the project team. When an organization's CIO comes into a project as part of a steering committee and states that the Alithya process is some of the best in class work that she's seen in her career, you know it is something special. I don't know how to interpret that other than to say I think what Alithya has is unique."

He continues, "The way the Alithya team organizes the project from the very start, to the way you break out on a weekly basis, the review of each of the different entities, the overview of that entity, the homework assigned to it, the very clear expectation of it, etc. was the reason why we are successful. So much so that we will be using the same process for our phase two."

And, we're going to rely on that thorough process to essentially train our other sales group on that software because it's that effective." In addition, "There were times that we had to make quick pivots and review the project scope to make sure we were still within the statement of work. The Alithya team was flexible and stayed within the time and materials project line. We actually still finished under budget in terms of the allocated hours, which was great. I think that's a reflection of both Alithya's efficiency and ours as a client."

THE ALITHYA TEAM WAS RELIABLE AND ADAPTABLE WITH A CONSISTENT MESSAGE ACROSS ALL OF THEIR TEAMS. THEIR CULTURE CREATES A LEVEL OF PARTNERSHIP, EXPERTISE, AND CONSISTENCY.

– Steve Woodside

Alithya is a leading strategy and digital technology company with over 2,000 highly skilled professionals delivering solutions across Canada, the US and Europe. Alithya's Microsoft practice covers a wide array of capabilities including Dynamics, Azure, business analytics, digital solutions, advanced analytics, application development and architecture. Focused on business outcomes, our combined companies have delivered Microsoft ERP, CRM, BI and digital solutions to over 1,200 clients. Alithya's global offering is to deliver strategy and digital technology services.