

**STAR**

MICROSOFT  
NAVISION

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An in-depth Case Study



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Re-aligning IT systems following an acquisition or merger can be a complex process – especially if the combined organisation is to gain maximum business benefit. There is a danger, however, that the senior party to the deal will be biased towards its incumbent systems, and so miss an opportunity to evaluate and rationalise its IT needs.

But that was not the case when CGI – which with 25,000 professionals and revenues of US \$3 billion is one of the largest independent IT and business process services firms in the world – embarked on a number of significant acquisitions as part of its continuing expansion into Europe and the Asia Pacific region.

CGI went into the IT evaluation with an open mind and decided that one of the systems acquired as a result of a merger would help take its existing accounting and financial functions to an even higher level.

The story starts back in July 1997 when Dinesh Sanghvi joined the UK operation of IT services and consulting company, IMRglobal, as Finance Director and decided to implement the Microsoft Navision business management package that had been bought – but not deployed – by his predecessor.

Although Navision is billed as a full enterprise management system, Sanghvi's prime interest was the impact that Navision could have on the financial side of the operation.

“We needed to telescope the familiarisation and implementation process so it made sense to bring in some external resource, and so began our relationship with Star Computers. With Star's help, the system went live on 1st January 1998 and we started to reap the benefits, not just from its application as an accounting tool but also from the analysis and reporting functions that are essential to making

informed business decisions,” Sanghvi recalls.

Three years later, when CGI acquired IMRglobal and reviewed its IT systems, the senior managers were sufficiently impressed with Navision to ask Sanghvi to expand it into CGI's UK and mainland Europe operation.

“The CGI system had very good processes and was working well but the feeling was that Navision would take us to the next level, helping to support the agility of the business,” Sanghvi says.

By then, Sanghvi and his colleagues were very experienced users. The system had been successfully deployed, it was stable and reliable – and also, with Star's support, a major upgrade had been completed successfully.

Fast forward to May 2004, when CGI joined forces with US-headquartered

business and IT consulting firm, AMS (American Management Systems). This strengthened CGI's global presence even further, with additional locations in the UK, Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland, and Sweden, as well as in Australia. These businesses were brought together with CGI's existing operations under the umbrella of CGI Europe & Asia Pacific.

"Following evaluation, there was no doubt that CGI's Navision-based financial accounting and reporting system should be extended to the newly acquired business units," Sanghvi says. "But on this occasion, we had some pretty tough project objectives and timelines that had to be achieved. We explained to the Star project team that AMS's European locations were linked to the US and had to be de-coupled. At the same time, the European and Australian operations had to be migrated onto a single Navision platform – and it all had to be done within 10 weeks.

"This type of situation illustrates the paramount importance of a trusted business relationship. CGI's success has been built on long-term relationships

with its clients and Star shares this core value. I had full confidence that together, we could deliver."

The joint CGI and Star project team was quite small – a complement of around 10 people including financial and technical people – for the scale of the project, that involved physical work in four locations, setting up over 20 countries in a variety of currencies. The systems had to be ready to start posting accounting transactions from a go-live date of 1st October, including completion of the whole installation and training process.

It was a very complex and demanding exercise during which the different regulatory, record keeping and reporting requirements of each country had to be satisfied. "With Star's help, we successfully implemented Navision in Madrid, Dusseldorf, Stockholm and Sydney, on time and within budget. Taking into account the peak holiday season in the middle of the implementation, this was a remarkable achievement," Sanghvi says.

"Chris Willoughby, Finance Manager within CGI's European Finance Team, played a valuable role, taking on the mantle of project leader

for CGI and working closely with Star's team at a number of overseas locations. Star's people showed a total understanding of the importance of the implementation to CGI that was reflected in their commitment and professionalism. For one key Star member, this involved changing her holiday plans and spending a considerable time away from home, working long hours and on occasion, late into the night to make system changes without affecting users," Sanghvi adds.

The end result is that in Navision, CGI Europe & Asia Pacific has a common, fully functional, financial accounting and reporting platform that has scaled successfully from supporting

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Dinesh Sanghvi  
Finance Director

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Chris Willoughby  
Finance manager

a business of 300 people to more than 1200. Sanghvi can’t put a direct monetary value on the system but he is certain that it is playing a key role, not just in how CGI runs its business operation, but also in how it deals with the financial aspects of its client relationships.

Also, because of the company’s faith in the quality and level of Star’s services, CGI decided to host the entire system on one platform, at its Stevenage office. This means there is no need for duplication of in-country support outside of the UK. The help desk, for example, is accessed by CGI staff from Star’s Watford location and from where Star has secure remote access for query resolution and system fixes.

Now that this phase of the consolidation has been completed, phase two is under way. Star is working alongside CGI’s internal people to link the Niku time recording system – on which CGI relies for consultancy time and expenses billing – into Navision. Sanghvi did not want to take the risk of trying to deal with this at the same time, especially as CGI

had upgraded to a completely new version of Niku that was so different as to be virtually a new product.

Chris Willoughby is again heavily involved as project leader for the current enhancements, complementing the technical project leader’s role by providing input from the business side – such as on reporting, processing, procedures and so on – as well as the change management aspects that are a vital part of successful implementation.

“Thankfully, we have a little more time for phase two, with a go live date of 1st October 2005. Whilst the ability of Navision to integrate with other systems is strong, writing the interfaces is challenging. But we’ll get there – on time and within budget,” he concludes.

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