

**STAR**

MICROSOFT  
NAVISION

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a vital tool in keeping  
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be a complex  
business operation.**

An in-depth Case Study



## The outcome was so striking that the board of directors in Munich gave approval for Navision to be rolled out internationally, – Europe-wide and into the US office.

When it comes to the fast-moving world of Internet technology solutions, few organisations can match Unipalm (Computerlinks UK) for breadth of experience and pedigree. It is fair to say that when Unipalm was founded in 1986, it pioneered the UK commercialisation of IP (Internet Protocol), becoming the first supplier of the essential building blocks on which so many of today's networked and online business operations rely.

Now, Unipalm is recognised as the UK and Ireland's foremost specialist distributor of Internet technology solutions – providing a single point of expertise and assistance for channel partners implementing intelligent network environments and integrated, scalable security systems.

Meint Dijkstra, Head of Technical Services for Unipalm, explains, "We operate through a network of reseller partners – including VARs, OEMs, systems integrators, ASPs

and ISPs – supplying solutions from world-leading hardware and software manufacturers.

"Essentially, we take on the role of the vendor; handling sales, marketing, pre-sales technical advice, post sales support, and so on. So vendors don't need to set up a local office, employ staff or run their own physical distribution and shipping operation. We also provide a range of professional services including consultancy, analysis and training."

Unipalm's list of vendor partners reads like a Who's Who of the online world, featuring vendors such as Aruba, Blue Coat, Check Point, Citrix Systems, Clearswift, Crossbeam Systems, Nokia, Symantec, Trend Micro, Websense and WebTrends – to name a few.

Notably, in contrast to the adage that cobblers' children are often worst shod, Unipalm is an enthusiastic advocate of online and e-business

applications, to the extent that its Microsoft Navision business management system not only pervades the UK operation but reaches out through its parent company, Computerlinks, across Europe and into North America.

"The Navision system is a vital tool in keeping on top of what can be a complex business operation. It is a completely integrated and transparent system that tracks transactions in their entirety, from initial enquiry and quote, through stock matching, to invoicing, receipt of payment from the customer, shipping and settlement of the vendor's invoice. Authorised people can log into the system – whether in the UK or overseas – to look at each location's stock holding to fulfil orders. Senior managers, such as Computerlinks' financial director in Germany, can interrogate the system to ask questions such as how much money is tied up in goods received but not yet invoiced or analyse sales

by product by vendor, and so on,” Meint says.

“This level of integration and access is fundamental to the way in which we do business.”

Initially, when Meint and his colleagues started work on installation and development of the Navision system with the assistance of Star Computers back in 2001, it was intended solely for the Unipalm OK operation, but it was not long before Computerlinks recognised its potential as a pan European application.

From a technical and capability aspect, the IT team at Unipalm were pretty switched on, although they needed some help to get up to speed with Navision before bringing ongoing development and maintenance in-house. The company had great aspirations for the system and Star and Meint came to the conclusion that it would make sense for Unipalm to have its own Microsoft Navision developer's licence.

It also made sense to strengthen Unipalm's internal application team. At the time, Navision expertise was in short supply but Star tracked

down, interviewed and seconded skilled developers from overseas, who subsequently became full time Unipalm staff members.

Enquiries and orders come into Unipalm's Newmarket offices by phone or email where they are handled by a dedicated team of managers. Their task is to give customers advice on the most suitable products, provide pricing information, deal with problem resolution – whatever is necessary from a customer service viewpoint. The Computerlinks board is very customer focused, as are all of its operating companies.

An essential forerunner to providing exceptional customer service was the need to get the basics right. So development started with deployment of the sales and purchase order processing, accounting, cash and general ledger applications. Then the emphasis shifted to sales and customer relationship management.

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a very big project, its flexibility as a product coupled with its speed of development, meant we are able to deliver comparatively quickly. If you want to create a system environment where you can really make it work the way you want, it is a brilliant product. Unlike some packages, you don't have to change the way in which you do business.

The roll-out process is now nearing completion and by the end of the year 2006 all 13 countries in the Computerlinks group will be running Navision. “We have a totally integrated set of applications that in combination with the SQL Server database provides a valuable real-time insight into all aspects of our operations, regardless of the geography,” Meint says.

Users appreciate the access that the system gives them to customer and financial information – and have high expectations of what might result from ongoing enhancements. The system never stands still and the more that the systems department gives users, the more they want. Meint takes this as a positive endorsement!

So what has happened to Star Computers' role now that Meint and his team are practically 100% self-sufficient in Navision?

“Obviously, the need for hands-on day-to-day external support has gone down as our expertise has grown,” Meint says, “although Star still manages our Microsoft relationship – and I greatly value Star's advice and input. Star is a Microsoft Gold Partner and I find it very useful to be able to phone in to discuss topics, such as recruitment issues, what is happening in the market and so on. Star is also a good sounding board for system development ideas,” Meint comments.

“I know that if I call Star I know I can rely on sound, sensible advice.”

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