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Taking IT out of the corner, Müller Dairy

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Introduction

Müller Dairy is one of the food industry's great success stories. Recognized as the number one yogurt brand in the UK, this innovative dairy business started life in a small Bavarian village in 1896 and hasn't stopped growing since. The success seems to have come naturally over the years, as a result of the company's strong values and incredible flair for innovation. This is demonstrated not only by a product range that has revolutionized the world of yogurts as we knew it, but also by Müller Dairy's skilful marketing strategy.

A high standard for the company's IT department to live up to, some may think, but, at Müller Dairy, it's actually IT that drives change these days. It wasn't always the way. Stephen Kane, Head of IT, joined the company three and a half years ago with a remit to introduce ITIL®.

By 2009, Stephen had turned around the IT function from a department with a reputation that showed room for improvement into a first-class internal service provider, exceeding each one of its key performance indicators (KPIs) and inspiring the rest of the business with its drive for continuous improvement. This transformation came about as the result of a change in culture and the introduction of proactive processes, underpinned by the adoption of Sunrise's IT service management software, Sostenuto.

IT as a service

At the origin of this transformation was the recognition by Müller's executive board that a shift was needed in the role that IT played within the business: from an era in which the company's main focus was cost saving and IT was a reactive, necessary evil, to a time where performance is to take centre stage, with IT its main enabler.

Steps were taken to create 'IT as a service', in Stephen's words. Eighteen business partners were designated from within the IT department to interface with 18 functional areas in the business. Thanks to formal meetings held on a monthly basis between the business partners and the departments, as well as regular surveys, IT now has the information needed to put together constructive action plans, rather than simply responding to the usual complaints, such as 'the network is slow'. Now the service desk, service support and project development are all working to common KPIs and objectives, set within the framework of these action plans.

By 2009, IT was exceeding its KPIs. 'And underpinning this success was Sostenuto,' says Stephen. 'Without it, we wouldn't have had the year we have had, and as an instigator of change, I wouldn't have had the success and recognition that have come my way as a result.'

The Sostenuto alternative

'During the selection process,' remembers Stephen, 'we looked at a number of vendors and rated them on various criteria. I started by looking at the enterprise solutions offered by large vendors such as SAP, CA and BMC, until the reality of the budget hit. Then we found Sostenuto in a web search and, to be honest, I hadn't come across it before. However, by the time we'd carried out a thorough comparative evaluation, it became clear that Sostenuto offered a similar level of flexibility, but within a lighter, more manageable structure, and at a much, much lower cost.'

'A few years on,' continues Stephen, 'I can say that if anyone wants to understand ITIL, out of the box, at a great price, then Sostenuto is your solution, absolutely fit for purpose. The framework is there, very visual and easy to understand. Also, with Sostenuto, you know what you're getting, there's no 400 page manual involved, which was a great selling point as far as the team was concerned.'

'The wider adoption of Sostenuto within Müller speaks volumes for the acceptance that the software has had here,' says Stephen. Indeed, the software is also soon to be deployed within the company's sites in Germany.

'When you embark on a project like this, you need to know that you're going to get the backup you require,' he adds. 'The Sunrise team has been professional, tenacious and dedicated. The individuals are amenable and approachable. If an unknown appears, you always know someone will go away and come back with a solution.'

ITIL big bang

Although Müller had been following some of the ITIL processes before the project started, there were discrepancies between different areas of IT, and more structure was needed in its approach in order to improve overall performance. The concept of a service desk was useful in creating this momentum, bridging different areas of IT, and as the first port of call for incidents, service requests, problems, changes and releases.

Stephen adopted a 'big bang' approach to ITIL, driving for the adoption of all the disciplines right from the start. 'Looking back, it would have been easier to take a phased approach, as the amount of change involved was huge, but Sunrise bent over backwards to support us in our endeavours. Everyone has stepped up to the plate and now ITIL is here to stay.'

ITIL's acceptance is no surprise, considering the measurable benefits that have resulted from its implementation, with the IT service desk's KPI performance now exceeding 99% in an average week. It also scores a phenomenal 4.5 out of 5 for user satisfaction over the average month.

Change in perception

There has been a 180-degree change in the way IT is perceived within Müller, marked by the recent acknowledgement of its executive board that 2009 had been the best year ever for the department, both in terms of performance and reputation. Of course, this has a lot to do with the day-to-day running of IT, but also the way it now presents information to the business.

'New reports generated from Sostenuto have allowed us to demonstrate in a very tangible way how we perform in relation to our KPIs,' says Stephen. 'One area that has been particularly positive has been our impact on employee engagement, which measures motivation, satisfaction and loyalty throughout the company.'

After years of hiding in the corner, IT is now seen as the most important function in the organization, not only driving change, but also acting as a benchmark for other departments, where the opportunity to use ITIL principles is becoming increasingly attractive.

Future plans

In the wake of Müller Dairy's success, a wider roll-out of Sostenuto to the company's German sites, as well as in its distribution centres in Italy, is underway. Consistent with the company's philosophy of continuous improvement, Stephen is planning to roll out Sostenuto's self-service portal, Chameleon, as part of a new intranet that will act as a one-stop shop for employees. Longer term plans to draw up a roadmap for ITIL v3 mean that IT and the business will be even more closely bound together in future.

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