



Developer Taps New Revenue Source with Microsoft Business Solutions CRM

Overview

Country or Region: United Kingdom;
United States

Industry: High Tech and Electronics

Customer Profile

Nolan Computers, headquartered in the United Kingdom, is a company that develops and distributes business software worldwide, specializing in Microsoft® Business Solutions–Great Plains®.

Business Situation

Customers asked Nolan Computers to find a way to integrate data from Microsoft Great Plains accounting software with Microsoft Business Solutions CRM software to eliminate manual processes and save time.

Solution

Nolan Computers created Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM, software that streamlined the integration of Microsoft Great Plains with Microsoft CRM.

Benefits

- Helped customers work more efficiently
- Increased value for partners
- Boosted revenues
- Added partners and expanded markets
- Created opportunities for growth

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Kim Haythornthwaite, Business Development Manager/U.S. Division Manager, Nolan Computers

The customers of Nolan Computers—an independent software vendor and a Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner in the United Kingdom—were spending hours combining customer data from their customer relationship management (CRM) software with the data in their accounting centers. To help them, Nolan Computers developed Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM, which automatically integrates data from Microsoft Business Solutions CRM with data from Microsoft Business Solutions–Great Plains® software. The integration software eliminated time-consuming manual processes, increasing business efficiency. The software vendor’s partners cut integration implementations from weeks to days. And Nolan Computers boosted revenues—by a projected 20 percent the first year—added new partnerships, expanded markets, sold additional products, and gained more opportunities through its association with Microsoft.



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Situation

Nolan Computers, a business-software developer and distributor in the United Kingdom and a Microsoft® Gold Certified Partner, was founded in 1988. As an independent software vendor (ISV) and IT consultancy, the company serves users and resellers at 1,200 sites through its offices in the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. The company's customers include businesses with annual revenues from U.S.\$500,000 to \$1 million.

Nolan Computers has implemented Microsoft Business Solutions–Great Plains® for its customers since 1994. Over the years, the ISV has developed enhancements for Microsoft Great Plains to extend the software's capabilities, including creating modules to automate multicurrency bank reconciliation and intercompany postings. Nolan Computers also created products to integrate third-party customer relationship management (CRM) software with Microsoft Great Plains.

“After the general release of Microsoft Business Solutions CRM in January 2004, customers approached Nolan Computers about developing a product to integrate Microsoft CRM with Microsoft Great Plains. Microsoft Great Plains had the accounting features we wanted, and Microsoft CRM had the member-management features we wanted,” says customer Glenn Higley, Group Management Accountant, Federation Against Software Theft (FAST). “We just needed a way to link them.”

FAST, a nonprofit software-copyright organization with more than 3,000 members in the United Kingdom, develops education and enforcement programs designed to eliminate software theft and raise awareness of that problem. Customers like FAST and businesses that have a lot of customer data to manage wanted a solution to:

- Better manage customer contacts and eliminate manual processes, such as extracting data from Microsoft Great Plains and bringing it into Microsoft Office Excel 2003 spreadsheets to track or re-enter accounting information into their CRM system.
- Generate customer lists from Microsoft CRM for invoicing and to import the data into the accounting software to prepare actual billings.
- Pass sales orders to the accounting software as quickly as possible to speed up the processing and delivery of orders—something that businesses in highly competitive fields could use to differentiate their service.

As requests grew to provide the integration between Microsoft Great Plains and Microsoft CRM, Nolan Computers began work on a solution.

Solution

Drawing on its knowledge of Microsoft Business Solutions–Great Plains and its experience with earlier integrations, Nolan Computers developed the Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM, and in August 2004, the software passed the Microsoft CRM Test for ISV Solutions, performed by the independent testing firm VeriTest.

Nolan Computers used the Microsoft .NET Framework—an integral component of the Microsoft Windows® operating system that provides a programming model and runtime for Web services, Web applications, and smart client applications—and the application programming interfaces (APIs) of Microsoft Business Solutions CRM to create the Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM. “We created a stable and scalable product using many of the APIs, based on our experience developing products that have already been tested for performance and speed in many

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Shelly Sexton, Vice President, LightEdge Solutions

large installations,” says Kim Haythornthwaite, Business Development Manager/U.S. Division Manager, Nolan Computers. The Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM runs as a Microsoft Windows-based service that works with the Microsoft CRM server software or the Microsoft Great Plains software.

Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM gives the company’s customers the ability to pass data between Microsoft CRM and Microsoft Great Plains without requiring any hardware beyond that used to run the Microsoft Business Solutions software. The integration software can even bridge multiple business units and companies using Microsoft CRM and Microsoft Great Plains, bringing them together in one system. By using the integration bridge, customers gain real-time, two-way data transfers of:

- Account/customer data
- Case/service call transactions

The software also provides one-way data transfers of:

- Product/item data
- Quote/order/invoice/return transactions

Nolan Computers includes a management console in the integration software that features an intuitive interface for setting up and customizing integrations, viewing current activity, and analyzing historical activity logs. The software makes it easy to map data fields—that is, specify which data fields correspond to one another in the two Microsoft Business Solutions products. The mapping ensures smooth data transfers. And because Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM uses Microsoft SQL Server™ to store its database content—including configuration, mapping, and log data—it fits easily within the Microsoft Windows Server System™

integrated server software that the ISV’s customers use.

Benefits

For Nolan Computers, its customers, and its partners, developing an integration tool for Microsoft Business Solutions–Great Plains and Microsoft Business Solutions CRM offered many advantages. At last, customers had an easy way to integrate their accounting and CRM functions to increase their business efficiency. Partners found that the new software helped them set up solutions for customers in far less time. And Nolan Computers itself found its revenues rising and its partnerships and markets growing. Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM also provided opportunities to present other products that Nolan Computers offers, while the company’s relationship with Microsoft and other ISVs positioned it well for the future.

Helped Customers Work More Efficiently

The ISV’s customers have found that the integration of their Microsoft CRM and Microsoft Great Plains software has made them more efficient. “We have saved hours of time by eliminating manual processes and double entries,” says Higley of FAST.

Now, FAST uses Microsoft CRM to generate a list of the customers to be invoiced, query the database for the invoice amounts, and send that data to the accounts in Microsoft Great Plains. “We get a 12-month view of which members will be invoiced, when, and how much. And all that detail is there at the press of a button,” says Higley. “Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM has really increased our efficiency.”

Higley also appreciates the speed of the new integrated CRM and accounting system. “Now that we have integrated Microsoft CRM and Microsoft Great Plains, it’s easy to move from one screen to another. It’s so much faster,

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and the important information is more accessible—which helps when you're on the phone with a customer," he says.

In addition, the easy access to Microsoft CRM with the Microsoft Office Outlook® 2003 messaging and collaboration client makes a difference to the staff at FAST. "After using the Lotus product, being able to access Microsoft CRM from Outlook was like going home for me," says Higley. "I was back in a familiar environment."

Increased Value for Partners

For the partners of Nolan Computers, the flexibility of Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM helps them implement even complex integrations. "Enabling such tight integration between Microsoft Great Plains and the CRM data has surpassed all our customers' expectations," says Shelly Sexton, Vice President, LightEdge Solutions, an IT services company and partner to Nolan Computers since 2002

LightEdge, headquartered in Des Moines, Iowa, provides fully managed network and business services for small and medium-sized businesses in the midwestern and southwestern United States. LightEdge is handling several Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM implementations. "The configuration and mapping of this software streamlines integration for us, which helps us efficiently adapt the tool to our customers' unique needs, saving them time and money," says Sexton.

The Workflow Manager interface of the Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM is flexible and easy-to-use with simple one-to-one mapping and the ability to add scripting to solve more complex requirements. "This flexibility allows LightEdge to meet even the most complex integration needs," says Sexton.

LightEdge has saved enormous amounts of time since working with the Nolan Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM. "Prior to deploying this product, we'd spend months working on the integration. Now, we can do it in days," Sexton says. As a result, LightEdge is including the Integration Bridge with all of its Microsoft CRM and Microsoft Great Plains deployments as a standard integration tool. Based on its success with the software, LightEdge expects to maintain a long relationship with Nolan Computers.

Brought More Success to Nolan Computers

For Nolan Computers itself, the move to develop the software based on Microsoft CRM has proven to be a good one. Among the benefits that Nolan Computers has experienced are:

- **Increased revenues**

Nolan Computers has seen its revenues increase significantly since releasing Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM. The company is on target for a 20 percent rise in revenues in the first year. "The response has been so positive from our customers and partners that we expect this growth to continue," says Haythornthwaite.

- **Added partners, expanded markets**

Integration Bridge for Microsoft CRM has attracted the interest of other IT firms around the world. In fact, Nolan Computers added two new partners in South America after introducing the integration software, and the company is now poised to capture more opportunities in these new markets.

- **Created opportunities for long-term growth**

Another key advantage Nolan Computers gained by working with Microsoft was the exposure to other Microsoft partners. "As we build relationships based on Microsoft CRM, we raise the level of awareness of our company and the other products in our line with many more people," says Haythornthwaite. "We are forging the trust

For More Information

For more information about Microsoft products and services, call the Microsoft Sales Information Center at (800) 426-9400. In Canada, call the Microsoft Canada Information Centre at (877) 568-2495. Customers who are deaf or hard-of-hearing can reach Microsoft text telephone (TTY/TDD) services at (800) 892-5234 in the United States or (905) 568-9641 in Canada. Outside the 50 United States and Canada, please contact your local Microsoft subsidiary. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to: www.microsoft.com

For more information about LightEdge Solutions products and services, call (515) 471-1000 or visit the Web site at: www.lightedge.com

For more information about Nolan Computers products and services, call (44) (0) 1252 811 663 in the United Kingdom or (303) 665-9343 in the United States or visit the Web site at: www.nolancomputers.com

and respect that will serve us over time.”

Although Integration Bridge for CRM is still early in its life cycle, based on the product's early success, the response of its customers, and the encouragement of its own partners, Nolan Computers sees becoming a Microsoft partner as one of the smartest decisions the company has made. “Microsoft CRM represents a good long-term growth prospect,” says Haythornthwaite. “We're glad we got involved early and started building the relationships that can make our company even more successful.”

Microsoft Business Solutions

Microsoft Business Solutions offer integrated business applications and services that allow small and midsize organizations and divisions of large enterprises to connect employees, customers, and suppliers for improved efficiency. The financial management, customer relationship management, supply chain management, and analytics applications work with other Microsoft software, including the Microsoft Office System and the Windows operating system, to streamline processes across an entire organization. This gives businesses insight to respond rapidly, plan strategically, and execute quickly. Microsoft Business Solutions are delivered through a worldwide network of channel partners that provide specialized services and local support tailored to a company's needs.

For more information about Microsoft Business Solutions, go to: www.microsoft.com/businesssolutions

Software and Services

- Microsoft Business Solutions
 - Microsoft Business Solutions CRM
 - Microsoft Business Solutions–Great Plains
- Microsoft Office System
 - Microsoft Office Outlook 2003

- Microsoft Windows Server System
 - Microsoft SQL Server 2000

Partners

- LightEdge Solutions