

GA Foods

GA Foods Provides
Nutritious Meals
with Help from Aptean
Food & Beverage ERP



Industry

Food & Beverage

Challenges

- » Complex organization with a lot of disparate systems
- » Stalled growth with generic solutions

Benefits

- » 90% growth in revenue after implementing Aptean Food & Beverage ERP
- » Improvements to efficiency and productivity across the organization
- » Increased data accuracy



Nourishing Health and Hope

While some may take the concept of having a reliable, steady source of nutrition for granted, there are many people today who lack the support network to provide this essential component of life. According to the hunger relief organization Feeding America, an estimated 1 in 8 Americans are classified as “food insecure,” meaning that they lack a consistent access to food. Denied a steady source of nourishment, these people face challenges in maintaining a healthy, active life.

For more than 40 years, GA Foods has operated with a single, driving goal: providing meals to those in need. This encompasses many different channels, including infants and children, military personnel, disaster relief, and senior citizens.

What started as a single production facility in St. Petersburg, Florida, has grown into an operation that proudly oversees the daily delivery of nutritious meals to seniors and children throughout Florida and Georgia, along with distributing shelf-stable products to customers in more than 40 states. In addition, whenever a hurricane, tornado, flood, blizzard, or other natural disaster strikes, GA Foods is a first-line meal provider.

From the complete manufacture of healthy, nutritious meals to the delivery of these meals to those who need them, GA Foods truly encompasses the entire length of the supply chain, all while never wavering from a mission of compassion and care.



“One of the core things that really **resonates** with most people who work here is that we **serve people** who wouldn’t eat otherwise.”

Bethannva Lavanis, Chief Financial Officer GA Foods




Looking for a Flexible Software Solution

The nature of the company’s focus puts GA Foods in the unique position of having to deal with concerns and issues that span a few different subsets of the food industry. While the company is ostensibly a food manufacturer, their 25,000 home deliveries each week means they have to also address the logistical challenges that are typical for food distributors. GA Foods also has a catering division that undergoes constant menu reformulations. Finally, with a large percentage of their customers being insurance providers, the company’s expertise must extend beyond the food industry arena altogether and address the challenges of medical billing. The end result is a complex organization with a lot of disparate pieces that all need to fit together for maximum efficiency and profitability.

The company had continued to grow and expand, but by 2013, it seemed as if this growth had begun to stall, and it became apparent that a significant modernization effort, both the perspective of general business practices and the technology being used to run the company, would be necessary. Over the next few years, Chief Technology Officer Andy Borgmann instituted a number of changes, but the greatest would be the implementation of a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) software system that allowed GA Foods to take advantage of cutting-edge technologies and grow in the future. “We needed more than what was just sort of an off-the-shelf, straight out of the box ERP system,” says Andy. “Because we weren’t just food manufacturing, we were equally distribution, we do things like medical billing. We had some complexity there that your average food manufacturer that was going to buy an off-the-shelf ERP system just was not going to need.”

Understanding that an ERP implementation would be a significant undertaking, Andy brought on a dedicated project manager, Beth Ann Valavanis. She and Andy began the search for a software solution that was customizable and user friendly, with easy access to data. They narrowed down the list of possibilities to a handful of products. Very early on, they identified Aptean Food & Beverage ERP *bcFood Edition*, which was built on Microsoft's Dynamics NAV ERP system, as a strong candidate. The functionality within Aptean Food & Beverage ERP was more fully-featured than the other choices, but even more important was Aptean's willingness to assist GA Foods in further tweaking their software to meet their needs. As Beth Ann explains, "A lot of the other vendors were really hesitant to want us to do anything custom. Aptean was quick to talk through some of the stuff that is very specific to our business, as well as understand the complexities that we're dealing with."



"The technology has gotten out of the way, and it enables us to really focus on serving more people as efficiently and cost effectively and safely as possible. That's our future."

Andy Borgmann, Chief Technology Officer GA Foods

The Implementation Process: A Determined Team with a Firm Goal


Aptean's willingness to enhance and customize their software was a true differentiator in the market, and GA Foods selected them as their software vendor. But it quickly became apparent that extensive customization would be challenging, especially with the tight timeframe proposed by GA Foods.

"When we told Aptean that we had chosen them and that we are going to go live essentially eight months later, they told us we were crazy," laughs Beth Ann. Even in projects that do not have a good deal of customization, an eight-month timeframe is on the shorter end of the spectrum; it is not unusual for heavily-customized projects to take longer than a year. But due to some of the accounting concerns that stemmed from the unique cross-pollination of businesses performed at GA Foods, it was essential that they go live at the beginning of the next fiscal year.

Aptean was committed to helping GA Foods implement Aptean Food & Beverage ERP within their desired timeline. Both organizations agreed upon a schedule of milestones and deadlines, and each week they met to assess progress. One area in particular that would be critical to the success of the project was training. Having used the legacy software at GA Foods for decades, the company's users had a comfort level with the older program; if the January 1 go-live was to be a success, everyone would need to quickly attain a comfort level with Dynamics.

With Beth Ann fully devoted to leading the project, training was performed on a weekly basis. In between training sessions, users were encouraged to access the company's sandbox environment to experiment with the new system. By taking the initiative to learn the system, employees were better prepared for when the cutover became a reality.

It was a hectic eight months for everyone, but the hard work put in by both organizations paid off, and GA Foods was able to roll out their Aptean Food & Beverage ERP solution on their desired go-live date of January 1, 2016.



“One thing that I really appreciated about Aptean was that they put the onus on us internally to do a lot of our own documentation and our own training. They guided us along the way, but it was something that ultimately, if we were going to be successful, we had to be able to have champions internally.”


Beth Ann Valavanis, Chief Financial Officer GA Foods



Unique Features to Address Unique Needs

For all of Aptean's more than 30 years of working with food companies, some of the requests from GA Foods brought were brand new. One example of this was the company's "menu system." When a school or a senior center places meal orders with GA Foods, this is performed strictly as a "count" – they might need 10 meals on Monday, 14 meals on Tuesday, and so forth. These counts then need to be converted over to an actual item within Dynamics in order to drive production scheduling and material requisitions.

The development team at Aptean was able to take these concepts and fashion a working solution that replicated this business processes within the software. Due to complexity behind something like the menu system, one might be forgiven in anticipating issues with the functionality. But the users at GA Foods have reported nothing but smooth, simple transactions.



“The beautiful part of the implementation with Aptean was that they were being run by some really good developers that could take real-world concepts and create software that could produce what [we] needed it to do.”

Andy Borgmann, Chief Technology Officer GA Foods

While GA Foods required a number of customizations such as the menu system in order to properly address their needs, they were able to take advantage of many out-of-the box features, as well. Aptean Food & Beverage ERP's sales contract functionality, for example, made it possible for users to enforce greater levels of control and ensure that customer agreements exist for the right items at the right prices. And the integrated nature of Dynamics has given the accounting team a much more accurate picture of the company's financial data.

A Modern System Built for Growth

Since going live with their Aptean Food & Beverage ERP solution in 2016, GA Foods has enjoyed a 90 percent growth in revenue while maintaining a relatively steady headcount. This has been largely due to having a modern ERP system in place to facilitate such rapid growth. “Over the last three and a half years, we couldn't have grown as a company,” affirms Beth Ann. “We couldn't have taken on initiatives. We couldn't have moved into this next phase that we've been planning for strategically without having a system like Microsoft NAV.”

Shortly after the initial go-live, it became apparent that the increase in business had a very real-world impact. As Andy explains, “Think about having 500 sales orders a day. You don’t want to have reams and reams of paper in filing cabinets, and boxes put in warehouses, and all that.” GA Foods implemented the OCR functionality within Dynamics in conjunction with Aptean Food & Beverage ERP’s document basket, making it possible to scan documents directly into the system and automatically attach them to the corresponding sales order records within Dynamics. “Being able to constantly improve the process and the customization absolutely is a value of NAV, and a value of what we’ve done with the implementation with Aptean.”

While the benefits of their Aptean Food & Beverage ERP implementation are obvious from the perspective of the company’s technology, many external business processes have been improved as part of an effort to further optimize activity within the software. In order to better take advantage of the warehouse management capabilities in Dynamics, for example, GA Foods completely re-structured their warehouse to promote efficiency in locating, moving, and picking inventory.

“The implementation forced us to get other aspects of our business in order, such as our accounts receivable team through assignments of accounts and things like that,” explains Beth Ann. “All those things beyond just the system really allowed us to position ourselves for more.”

Getting Back to Business

Like any successful organization, GA Foods continues to search for new ways to advance their business, fully confident that any improvements to the company’s processes can be properly replicated in their ERP system. Recently, they started exploring perpetual inventory systems, which will certainly require some changes to how users use the software. And given the company’s focus on serving groups like children and seniors, enhancements to risk management and mitigation will be a continuous process. Since the initial go-live, for example, GA Foods has used Aptean Food & Beverage ERP to implement expiration date tracking, providing complete visibility to the expiration date of every lot record, and ensuring that only the freshest, safest food is being shipped out to customers.



More than anything else, the future software concerns at GA Foods involve questions around scaling for more growth. It is no secret that the United States population continues to age. The rising number of retirees and seniors, coupled with increased life expectancies, points to more and more people in need of meal programs. In light of these realities, the rapid growth seen at GA Foods over the past few years shows no signs of abating. But whereas the thought of growth at such an exponential pace on an outdated system would be cause for concern, the company can rest easy in the knowledge that Apteian Food & Beverage ERP will allow them to manage this growth without adding complexity or headcount.

"The technology has gotten out of the way, and/or it enables us to really focus on serving more people as efficiently and cost effectively and safely as possible," says Andy. "That's our future."



Are You Ready to Learn More?

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Contact us at info@apteian.com or visit www.apteian.com.



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