**Client overview**

Computer Aid is a global IT services firm that manages active engagements with more than 100 Fortune 1000 companies and government agencies around the world.

**Solution**

Computer Aid worked with sa.global to consolidate financial and business management of all its operating units with Microsoft Dynamics AX 2009.

**Results**

By implementing Microsoft Dynamics, Computer Aid was able to:

- Improve cash flow
- Reduce the billing cycle by 50%
- Gain reliable and real-time information

"By using Microsoft Dynamics, we’ve tightened our revenue-to-cash cycle while providing more detailed, timely, and actionable operating information to our leadership team."

Andy McIntyre  
CFO  
Computer Aid Inc.

www.saglobal.com
Need for accurate and insightful data

Computer Aid has maintained an entrepreneurial culture that is typical of much smaller companies. Its management approach rewards individual ownership and success, which helped the firm achieve US $300 million in revenue in 2011, $50 million of which was new business.

Maintaining the culture of personal investment became painful and difficult as people interacted with outdated software. To manage its business, Computer Aid had integrated its highly customized general ledger software with Intuit QuickBooks (which the firm’s overseas offices used), multiple time entry programs, and other client service and administrative applications.

Company leaders realized that this system would undermine responsiveness to clients and hinder the company’s prospects for further expansion. Andy McIntyre, CFO at Computer Aid, remarks, “It’s in our DNA to build rather than buy, but over time, this resulted in 15 individual systems that were aggregated through internally developed tools and held together with Microsoft Excel spreadsheets.” Thus, Computer Aid faced several challenges:

- Difficulty in gaining business insights: With monthly, static reports, people found it difficult to gain the timely operational insight they needed to drive success. Working with multiple systems, McIntyre says, “We’d inevitably run into disparities in data. Among a group of 25 people, we were maintaining more than 250 spreadsheets outside the core accounting system to manage the business.”
- Customized billing: To customize invoice information according to customer needs, the firm had to produce free text invoices, a process that delayed invoicing.
- Change in accounting method: Computer Aid wanted to change from a modified cash basis to an accrual basis for internal reporting purposes. This would have been very difficult with the existing system.
- High support costs: “We ended up with a solution that required the equivalent of six full-time people to manage and support,” says McIntyre.

The firm wanted to bring all practice and financial management into a single system, make information more reliable and personally insightful, and provide timely access to it.
To improve access to profitability and performance management information in a flexible, modern technology platform, Computer Aid deployed Microsoft Dynamics and went live with it in March 2011. Approximately 40 people in corporate accounting use the core system, about 200 access rich, interactive reports through PowerPivot for Microsoft Excel, and 1,300 employees enter time and report expenses via portal-based applications in Microsoft Dynamics by using an Internet browser.

Computer Aid uses project accounting capabilities to track all labor against customer billable projects or selling, general, and administrative expense. The firm relies on professional services automation functionality for costing, billing, and project accounting.

The enterprise resource planning (ERP) software supports the finance department with accrual-based accounting and gives people the tools and reports they need, with the flexibility to conduct business the way they are accustomed to working. “What attracted us to Microsoft Dynamics was the price point and the fact that we could tailor it to our needs,” explains Derek Sager, Director of Finance at Computer Aid. “I came from organizations that used SAP and Oracle. These alternatives are costly; would have given us, essentially, a ‘process-in-a-box’, and lacked the option to tailor them affordably, if at all, to match our way of doing business.”

Computer Aid considered several qualified implementation partners but selected sa.global for its expertise in professional services. “The people from sa.global asked the right questions, demonstrated that they understood our unique needs, and took the time to demonstrate how we could meet our needs by using Microsoft Dynamics,” says McIntyre.
Empower users with real-time information

Computer Aid can consolidate financial and business management of all its operating units in Microsoft Dynamics, ultimately positioning the firm for the next stage of growth.

• Empower people with interactive reporting: In the old system, conducting analyses typically required submitting a request to the finance team. “Now, with robust, self-service reporting based on real-time data in Microsoft Dynamics, people can understand what is happening in the business, see trends, and act on them,” says McIntyre. “Self-service reporting fits our culture of individual ownership and contributes to our corporate success. People can use a familiar tool, Excel, to access it and because the reports connect to Microsoft Dynamics, the spreadsheets update with the current version of the data.”

• Improve cash flow, reduce billing cycle by 50 per cent: Computer Aid relies on prompt invoicing and wanted to reduce the lag time between the completion of services and client receipt of the invoice. “In less than a year of using Microsoft Dynamics, we cut our billing cycle in half,” expresses McIntyre. “We attribute that partly to standardizing on certain invoicing formats and partly to the visibility and efficiencies we gain from the ERP software. This is a huge win for us because it has had a positive impact on our cash flow.”

With 70 per cent of its business derived from time and materials (T&M) contracts, the reporting of service hours drives Computer Aid’s revenue. “We have reduced delinquent timesheets to within one per cent of all timesheets submitted weekly,” says Sager. “This gives us a real-time view of the financial impact of the T&M portion of our business.”

• Lower support costs by $400,000 annually: To stay competitive with other global providers, Computer Aid needs to keep overhead costs low. “With Microsoft Dynamics, we have saved $400,000 annually in support costs for ERP while reassigning several excess support staff to other roles where they can add more value,” says McIntyre.

• Manage business based on reliable, real-time information: Computer Aid has experienced a radical shift from questioning data to relying on it. “By using Microsoft Dynamics, we have tightened our revenue-to-cash cycle while providing more detailed, timely, and actionable operating information to our leadership team,” concludes McIntyre.