

Digital transformation helps Mitchells & Butlers go from 'good to great'

Delivery of SharePoint collaboration solution across 1,600 pubs and restaurant outlets in just 12 weeks

Pete Brown is a man accustomed to leading the delivery of complex technical projects and programs. In fact, he has over 20 years experience doing just that. But few of those have had as tight a timeline as his first major project as Head of Business Change for the UK's leading managed pub and restaurant operator, Mitchells & Butlers (M&B).

Pete was challenged to ensure the introduction of a new collaboration portal took place within the schedule the group CEO had announced to shareholders. In practice, that meant delivering a user-friendly solution across 1,600 outlets and thousands of employees within just 12 weeks.

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Pete Brown
 Head of Business Change
 Mitchells & Butlers

The portal was the last phase of a wider business improvement program known as "Good to Great", focused on digital transformation. It was designed to

streamline and where possible automate time-consuming manual tasks, such as regulatory and performance reporting and revolutionize information flow across the business.

With the support of Hitachi Consulting, Pete and the M&B team delivered a SharePoint and Business Intelligence solution supporting over 1,600 pubs and restaurants, plus several tiers of management, in record time. In just one year, it has tangibly transformed the way M&B works.

In the hospitality sector, the key to lasting success is ensuring that guests have a great experience – so they stay longer, and want to return. At Mitchells & Butlers, the company that runs many of the UK's best-loved pub and restaurant chains, including Toby Carvery, Harvester, Nicholson's, All Bar One and Sizzling Pubs, it was recognized that one vital aspect of a great experience is enabling employees to spend as much time as possible with guests.

Good to great

That was the guiding principle behind the company's "Good to Great" program – a cultural change, underpinned by digital transformation. It sought to reduce the administrative burden pub and restaurant employees faced and free them to focus on 'front of house' duties. At the same time, it aimed to transform the way M&B's 120-strong team of regional business managers (RBMs) worked.

Overview

Company challenge

- Deliver a new collaboration and reporting portal within 12 weeks
- Ensure the solution is user-friendly for 1,600+ pubs and restaurants
- Support improved performance monitoring and management
- Enable business decisions to be made at the right level

Solution overview

- User-friendly portal built on Office 365 and Microsoft Business Intelligence that provides at-a-glance reporting, scheduled tasks, emergency recall and mobile forms
- Allows centralized task allocation and scheduling to coordinate planned operational activities
- Richer, more relevant weekly sales reports targeted at outlet managers, regional business managers and central teams – reduced effort searching for sales KPIs
- Mobile forms have replaced paper checks and record keeping

The RBMs are a vital tier in the company's operating structure. Each manages a number of pubs in a specific region, and is responsible both for reporting to the center on outlet performance and where necessary improving that performance. It had become apparent, however, that as reporting demands increased, the RBMs ended up spending too much time handling data, reducing their capacity to work with pub and restaurant managers to drive business growth.

The first stages of the "Good to Great" program had seen the introduction of a new finance system and tills, so core data could flow better through the business. But that data was still hard to manage for RBMs, and there were still a lot of time-consuming administrative tasks for the outlets themselves – such as vital food hygiene checks, which have to be conducted and reported on regularly throughout the day.

Vision of collaboration

To address the administrative tasks M&B had decided to introduce a collaboration platform that would make recording and reviewing this information far simpler. The company's vision for the solution was one where paperwork was minimized and information presented in a role-relevant way. RBMs could manage by exception, outlet managers see and access the data they needed, and the center could distribute core assets such as new marketing materials in a highly focused way.

It made perfect sense in theory. But there was, as Pete recalls, just one slight issue: the timeline. "When I joined M&B in summer 2013, the 'Good to Great' program was already in-flight with timescales committed to the business and shareholders. There was no room for negotiation: we had to find a way to deliver the technical platform for January 2014."

That way proved to be a portal built by Hitachi Consulting, using SharePoint Microsoft Office 365.

One partner for front and back end

The choice of Hitachi Consulting reflected not only the company's expertise with Office 365—chosen by Pete and his team

as a more 'corporate' option than its main rival—but also its capability to manage the complex back end integration needed.

One of the vital requirements of the project was a customizable dashboard that would allow users to view all the performance information they needed on a single screen, a task Pete recognised as both challenging yet crucial to the program's success.

"With the timelines we had," Pete recalls, "we needed a partner that could deliver both the front end development of the portal and the back end integration with our data. Hitachi Consulting has been a partner for M&B for a long time and we had no doubts about their integration skills. We spoke with some of their other portal clients, and they gave Hitachi Consulting a glowing reference—one I can add to."

As well as next to real-time KPI reporting for each pub, each region and for the business as a whole, the portal also included:

- A compliance element that would make it easy for pubs and restaurants to meet food safety reporting regulation and adhere to M&B's own record keeping requirements – ideally delivered via a mobile solution
- A smarter communications platform that would eliminate the need for the central team to send out hundreds of pages of communications to each pub and restaurant by email or post, and where receipt and response could be confirmed

But features aside, there was a further critical requirement. "All of this had to be delivered in a package that would be easy to use – something that employees would 'get' within a few minutes. In a busy pub environment, a more complex solution just wouldn't be used," said Pete.

Agile, responsive, innovative

The project timescales meant normal working practices went out the window. In fact, Pete explains, his team was literally storyboarding the solution requirements day by day. "Sometimes, we had to make decisions overnight that would mean substantial changes in direction for the whole solution. Hitachi did a great job in supporting us to do that. They were very agile."

"Not only was the portal up and running, but we'd given pub managers the ability to complete forms – such as fridge temperature. An Android app had been developed and installed on 1,600+ devices, offering features such as automated alerts when important actions hadn't been completed. And user training had begun – all within 12 weeks."

Pete Brown
Head of Business Change
Mitchells & Butlers

Just one example of that came with the approach Hitachi took to the data challenge. The information that had to be presented is held in multiple different business systems. But writing and rewriting routines that had to access each of these systems for every inquiry would not only increase development time and cost, but also reduce responsiveness from the user angle.

Instead, Hitachi created a SQL Server-based data warehouse to integrate the data. The team could then write routines that gathered relevant data from within the data warehouse.

Of course, these were still subject to a good deal of discussion and change – as was almost every aspect of the developing solution. But despite this, the deadlines and equally tight budget were adhered to and by January 2014, Pete had a working collaboration platform to present.

Reaping the rewards

After one year, the benefits of the portal are firmly established. The compliance tools proved an instant hit with the outlets and have helped ensure managers and employees are able to spend more time serving guests, while the improved management information has been welcomed across the business – at outlet, RBM and now up to executive level at the head office.



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"We've had feedback that seeing live information is great, and that it is making life easier for our front line management team," Pete confirms.

"They get the information they need in a simple view, meaning they can make decisions and plan their time more effectively – coaching pub managers, supporting promotions and delighting our guests. And if any urgent issues emerge, they're immediately alerted."

As users have become more familiar with the solution, it's also beginning to drive further change and efficiency within the business. "Staff churn has always been a big cost for M&B. Through the new portal, we've been able to monitor churn more closely and—because we're more transparent about it—delegate more responsibility to regions and individual outlets to take action around it. Over the last year, churn has dropped. That saves the company money but also means that guests are more likely to be served by experienced employees," explained Pete.

Shoulder to shoulder

"Overall, the project has been a real success, and Hitachi played a huge part in that," said Pete. "The team Overall, the project has been a real success, and Hitachi played a huge part in that," said Pete. "The team were responsive, flexible and embedded themselves fully into our business. They were on site every day, and with us all the way shoulder to shoulder through every decision process and every quality gate. They made us aware of the impact of every decision and showed as much passion as we did for the project's success. You literally felt it was one team, all in it together, to achieve so much in such a short timescale."

About Hitachi Consulting

Hitachi Consulting is the global solutions and professional services organization within Hitachi Ltd., a global innovation leader in industrial and information technology solutions and an early pioneer of the Internet of Things. Hitachi Consulting is a business integrator for the IoT era and a catalyst for digital transformation. Using our deep domain knowledge, we collaborate with clients to help them innovate faster, maximize operational efficiency and realize measurable, sustainable business and societal value. As a consulting-led solutions company, we can help you leverage data as a strategic asset to drive competitive differentiation, customer loyalty and growth. To learn more, visit www.hitachiconsulting.com.

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