

SIX FLAGS

Solution Overview

Industry

Entertainment

Scenario

Extreme growth was outpacing the ability to efficiently integrate distribution processes and global reporting requirements.

Company Profile

Six Flags operates 39 amusement and water parks around the world.

Benefit

eEnterprise provided a central solution on standardized technology that has improved global distribution expenses and financial reporting.

Software Used

Microsoft Great Plains eEnterprise
 Financial Series
 Distribution Series
 Purchasing Series
 Customization/Integration Tools
 Enterprise Reporting
 FRx Financial Reporting
 Microsoft SQL Server 7.0
 Microsoft Windows 2000

Entertaining more than 50 million people annually at 39 different theme and water parks located across eight different countries – all while growing a multi-national organization – is not an easy task. Six Flags needed a single business solution to span the parks' diverse financial reporting needs. That's why Six Flags chose eEnterprise to create efficiency in a thrilling matrix of roller coasters, cotton candy, souvenirs and memory-making experiences.

Company

Based out of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, United States, Six Flags, Inc. is the world's largest regional theme and water park operator. Known for its family-fun atmosphere, Six Flags operates theme and water parks throughout Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Mexico, Netherlands, Spain and the United States. During the busiest seasons, Six Flags employs more than 50,000 people globally.

Situation

Six Flags' visitors weren't the only ones on a thrill ride. Annual revenues were creeping to more than \$1 billion USD, new parks were popping up around the world, and increasing ticket sales - via the web, phone and kiosk - were soaring to record levels. With the larger parks running a complex enterprise solution and the smaller parks running diverse smaller financial packages, the financial consolidation for these incompatible systems meant a flurry of faxes being sent across the globe. Inevitably, Six Flags needed to consolidate 12 different general ledgers. The management team realized that it was time to implement a centralized business management solution that would enable all 39 park management teams across the globe to collectively work together. A multi-national effort, with local support and customization, was at the core of an equation that would help Six Flags continue its exhilarating growth.

A Connected Solution

Though some consultants suggested that only a 'tier one,' or extremely complex, high-end solution would be able to meet Six Flags' growing demands, Six Flags selected eEnterprise on Microsoft SQL Server as the business management solution that would interconnect its global business. According to Joe von Bose, Six Flags Corporate Manager of Accounting Operations, "Cost was important – and the system had to be simple to learn, yet have extensive functionality to meet our global requirements." von Bose went on to state that Six Flags wanted to operate on standard technology, and that standard was Microsoft SQL Server.

Thinking Globally, Acting Locally

“We are saving at least 60 days per month by eliminating the countless hours expended on report consolidation, printing and distribution, which means not only a cost savings to our company, but also a better work environment for employees.”

Joe von Bose
Corporate Manager of Accounting Operations
Six Flags

Six Flags’ solution at the park level had to be supported in the local language, with adherence to local tax codes and local currency computations. Back at headquarters in Oklahoma, management needed global reporting capabilities. To handle this challenging implementation, Six Flags needed a coordinated international effort.

Early on, Six Flags selected Microsoft Great Plains Partner Collins Computing, based in Mission Viejo, California, United States, to design and implement its eEnterprise solution. “Collins Computing was able to design and configure our Great Plains implementation in a way that met our goals within the desired timeline, all while addressing issues of multiple languages, currencies and localization,” stated von Bose. “Collins was a real partner during the implementation phase—offering value-added service that has sealed our relationship for the long-term.”

Leveraging Microsoft Great Plains’ presence in more than 130 countries, Collins Computing established local partner networks and policies that would get Six Flags’ corporate up and running in just two months. “We know that service is one of the most important factors in the success of any implementation,” says Randy Forkner, Chief Operating Officer at Collins Computing. “That’s why we rigorously interviewed, then hand-picked, the local Microsoft Great Plains partners for their ability to provide quality implementation, training and support services to the various parks.”

With offices strategically located in France, Holland and Belgium, Collins Computing selected Microsoft Great Plains Partner Systems Advisers to manage Six Flags’ European operations. Committed to this new relationship, Systems Advisers’ Chief Executive Officer Stephen James stated, “Our focus as an organization is on international companies. By working closely with Collins Computing, we were able to put together an initial project plan for the roll out in France, Belgium and Netherlands and assign staff with the required local accounting and language skills. Despite challenging deadlines and time differences, our staff was able to take five Six Flags parks from zero-to-live in just six weeks.”

Lowering Costs – Increasing Satisfaction

With one enterprise-level solution, purchasing and inventory planning could now be implemented in an integrated, shared environment, enabling Six Flags to lower inventory overhead by providing various parks around the world the opportunity to “swap” high-cost parts needed to keep the complex park rides running smoothly. Customer satisfaction was also on the rise with a better stream of supplies hitting the stands on demand, rather than on a scheduled basis. And, usage reports were now available to vendors, allowing them to be more involved in supplying Six Flags with the materials on a timely, cost-efficient basis.

Everyone loves amusement parks, and Six Flags executives were just as delighted when they experienced the dependability and speed that eEnterprise on Microsoft SQL Server provided. “In one week alone, our Magic Mountain park generated more than 3,300 journal entries in eEnterprise. When you multiply that number across 38 additional parks, 52 weeks a year, you get a clear picture of what eEnterprise *can* and *must* handle,” said von Bose.

“The breadth of what Great Plains replaced is incredible – all without adding complexity, while still meeting global requirements. The speed of getting information to top executives, the saved time in training efforts, and the reduction of needed staff and support easily equates to an annual savings of more than \$1 million dollars (USD).”

Russell Kuteman
Vice President of Finance
Six Flags

For more information about Microsoft Great Plains Business Solutions, visit www.greatplains.com

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Consolidated Reporting – a Global Reality

Of all the expectations that eEnterprise had to meet, global reporting was one of the most important. In the past, Six Flags struggled to make various systems work together, and corporate reporting included hours of data uploads, manual consolidations and distribution to managers around the globe – often resulting in weekend-work for multiple employees. As a result, decisions were being delayed, and for a multi-national corporation, this practice couldn't continue.

Immediately, eEnterprise began to report a solid return on investment. Sharing a common system, executives around the globe could now run and build their own reports using eEnterprise's industry-standard reporting tools. And, users were able to drill back from any amounts within the system to gather greater detail – a feature that was not available in Six Flags' previous systems. “eEnterprise has given us our weekends back”, said von Bose. “We are saving at least 60 days per month by eliminating the countless hours expended on report consolidation, printing and distribution, which means not only a cost savings to our company, but also a better work environment for employees.”

Efficient in More Ways than One

Plainly stated, eEnterprise was saving Six Flags a lot of time, and the savings didn't stop there. A combined staff consisting of IT, technical support, and training personnel was able to go from 18 full-time employees to four full-time and four part-time employees at headquarters alone. “eEnterprise is simply easier to maintain and operate, which has allowed us to distribute valuable technical resources to other parts of the company,” says von Bose. “And, it's much less complex to learn,” commented von Bose. “We are now able to train users on the entire system in five days. On our past system, it took five days just for general ledger training alone.”

Vice President of Finance at Six Flags, Russell Kuteman, summed it up best: “The breadth of what Great Plains replaced is incredible – all without adding complexity, while still meeting global requirements. The speed of getting information to top executives, the saved time in training efforts, and the reduction of needed staff and support easily equates to an annual savings of more than \$1 million dollars (USD).”

Customized Service & Support

What caps off the experience is the service and support Six Flags continues to receive with eEnterprise.

The international network of Microsoft Great Plains partners, led by Collins Computing, continues to meet the demands of running Six Flags' amusement parks without a lot of ups and downs in their financial systems. “The beauty of using Collins Computing is that one other consultant and myself are the only internal people we need to keep this project running smoothly – I entrust the majority of the work to Collins Computing's global network of consultants,” said von Bose.