

Case story

How to Successfully Deliver a Challenging Upgrade Project Remotely During COVID-19

2022

MAC has promoted IT support for the mail order business right from the start and raised it into a new dimension with the establishment of e-commerce. In the process, extensive and sustainable knowledge was built up. As a service-oriented solution provider, they keep an eye on the big picture as well as the smallest details. And they are just as familiar with the specifics of the various forms of trade as they are with the possibilities of modern technologies.

MAC IT believes that in an increasingly complex and constantly changing market, IT is one of the key success factors for a shipper. Their DiVA solution provides the data and tools needed to make the best decisions to effectively manage the omni-channel business processes.

MAC IT has been partnering with Companial (former 1ClickFactory) since 2019 when they approached Companial with a customer using DiVA that needed to upgrade its solution. After having such a positive experience working together, MAC IT decided to entrust Companial with the challenge of upgrading DiVA's functionality to events.

Situation

The DiVA upgrade plan:

- Upgrade solution from Business Central 140 to 150
- Move custom fields from standard tables and pages to the extension.
- Move customizations from standard objects to the subscribers of standard event publishers where possible. Create custom publishers otherwise.
- Upgrade solution from Business Central 150 to 160
- Request new standard publishers from Microsoft.
- Upgrade solution from Business Central 160 to 170
- Reimplement some modules which are making breaking changes to the standard.
- Upgrade solution from Business Central 170 to 180 (all new standard publishers we requested are coming with 180).
- Reimplement customizations with new standard publishers
- Clean-up solution by reimplementing last 50-60 objects (involvement of functional experts from Partner side would be needed there).

Upgrading DiVA Remotely During Covid-19

In 2019, Companial had upgraded DiVA (the add-on) from version NAV 2018 to version Business Central 130. The next phase was supposed to cover re-doing the add-on to the extension technology and the plan was for two Companial Dynamics 365 Business Central developers to begin the upgrade tasks in March 2020. However, when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Companial was no longer able to send developers out to physically work at MAC IT, the Dynamics Partner site.

Given the change in the situation, the project was postponed for a month while Companial developed a new online approach. Many were skeptical about Companial's ability to deliver a project of that size without any live discussions or meetings, so Companial dedicated three developers to the project – two working part-time and one working on the project full-time.

Project Challenges & How Companial Overcame Them

First, Companial needed to figure out the best way to work remotely with MAC IT from project planning right through to project delivery. So, Companial together with Partner decided on a new approach to the project:

1. Divide the project into pieces and work based on agile principles

Together with the Dynamics Partner Companial decided to approach the project in smaller phases. This way the Dynamics Partner had a working solution throughout the project. Since Companial's work was based on a time and material-based contract, the agreement was to work with the Dynamics Partner for as long as required. Approaching the project in small pieces meant that there was less risk of the Dynamics Partner experiencing big project failures if something went wrong.

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2. Work as a member of the Dynamics Partner's company

Working as part of the Dynamics Partner's company had a huge impact. Throughout the project, it felt as though the Companial developers were part of the MAC IT team and not just another service supplier. The Dynamics Partner had its own project manager and we had daily stand-up meetings of 15 minutes, sprint meeting every 2 weeks (to discuss what had been implemented and what needed to be implemented during the next 2 weeks), as well as ad-hoc meetings if needed on specific tasks. Both the MAC IT team and Companial Team used a joint project management system, and Companial were included at every stage from planning sessions and reviews to building the project plan based on agile methodology and the entire project was handled on the basis of Azure DevOps. This kept everyone who was involved fully engaged – we even had team building activities together online!



3. Hands-On Involvement of Companial Senior Leadership

One of the biggest challenges with this project was the fact that it was not just a technical upgrade. The project required a deep understanding of business processes, conditions, functionalities, and therefore it was essential to have someone with a deep understanding and close relationship with the company. Therefore, Jonas Mikalkėnas, Dynamics NAV/Business Central Team Lead at Companial, worked closely with the MAC IT to help plan the tasks and organize the project. *"This project was a huge benefit to both the MAC IT and Companial teams; we learned a lot from each other. DiVA is a very interesting and complex add-on solution which required a deep analysis and level of expertise in order to understand how to upgrade it to an extension in the best way. It was really challenging to clean up the BaseApp from most complex customizations, but we did a great job there together. I am happy that Companial was able to help the MAC IT team with our competence and tools,"* shares Jonas.

4. Divide & Conquer By Playing to Our Strengths

The DiVA add-on had many technologies built on .NET, and recreating these as extensions is very challenging for someone that doesn't have a deep understanding of both technologies - .NET and C/AL or AL. Since MAC IT is planning to move to the cloud in the future, having everything done on new technology was essential for ensuring that the technology is ready to upgrade to SaaS when the time comes.

Dynamics 365 Business Central Online does not support .NET technology, except the one already implemented in Dynamic 365 Business Central. It is based on new technologies which allow you to do everything based on Dynamics 365 Business Central and no other technologies are needed, so what you do in this case is a full reimplementation. Therefore, this whole project consisted of upgrade tasks, development tasks and reimplementation tasks, plus some manual routine work. In general, we divided tasks among our programmers depending on their strengths. Individually, they didn't need to know every specific retail business aspect, but as a team we had a detailed understanding of how retail companies work.

Our Team Leads have seen numerous solutions throughout the years, have delivered over 650 NAV/BC upgrades and completed over 25000+ development hours per year. In addition, we have team members who have worked in Dynamics Partner companies and end-customer companies, so it is easier for us to successfully deliver large-scale projects thanks to our extensive practical knowledge and combined experience.

Why Did MAC IT Choose Companial?

MAC IT has great Dynamics 365 specialists of its own and encourages employee development through training and growth opportunities, however this particular project required Senior technical knowledge right away. MAC IT is rapidly growing and it needed senior resources quickly and there was no way a new team member could have grown into a senior position with all the necessary skills that quickly.

MAC IT was thrilled to add Companial 's Jonas Mikalkènas to the project as he held the right seniority level, experience with end-customers and Dynamics Partner projects, business understanding, not to mention his 18 years' of experience.

Just like that, what initially seemed impossible, delivering a complex upgrade project without interrupting business and by taking small steps, was made possible by partnering with Companial.

Why MAC IT Would Still Work With Companial Even If They Had The Expertise In-House

Dirk Petersen, Director Development & Innovation/CTO at MAC IT: “The project is coming to an end and we can confidently say, that we really needed the partnership with Companial. There is no way you can get such experience anywhere else in the market because of the number of upgrades Companial has delivered in the past. We are really happy with the cooperation and the project outcome.”

At Companial, we are constantly working on different upgrades and as a result, we see various solutions and situations. This wealth of experience makes it easier for us to deal with any kind of upgrade, no matter how complex. It also allows us to execute upgrades quickly and efficiently as we don't need to do the research that is required if such projects are completed internally by a Dynamics Partner. Plus, we have created our own internal tools to help complete tasks faster.

In some cases, Companial can complete specific technical tasks 4 to 5 times faster, saving Dynamics Partners both time and money.

What's next?

After we have finished upgrading the add-on fully, MAC IT will begin to upgrade its customers one by one. “We are looking forward integrating Companial into our customer upgrade projects. We really trust in their competence and technical skills from – this is the most important reason we chose Companial, because we want to do a good job for our customers.” Dirk Petersen, Director Development & Innovation/CTO at MAC IT.

No matter how complicated an upgrade appears to be, we're here to help! We've seen everything from unique upgrade requests, to change requests along the way, to non-standard project requirements, to clients that are way behind on Dynamics versions, to upgrading to on premises or SaaS and more. We can provide a fixed price proposal and expert help to ensure you, the Dynamics Partner, can provide the best possible solution to your end-customers.

Request an upgrade service today for a FREE upgrade analysis or contact us at service@companial.com if you have any questions.

