

Wildlife control company tames service call volumes through CRM

Southern Ontario firm equips field staff with BlackBerries, tablet PCs

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by Grant Buckler



The software [Humane Wildlife Control](#) used to manage its business was a square peg in a round hole, and made it difficult for the Hamilton-based company to grow. So on the recommendation of a local value-added reseller, Humane Wildlife Control switched to Microsoft Corp.'s Dynamics CRM.

Bill Dowd, the company's president, said the switch has improved customer service, boosted sales and will allow the company to expand into new markets this year.

Humane Wildlife Control has field staff in a number of southern Ontario communities who respond to calls from homeowners with small animals, such as raccoons and squirrels, in their attics and chimneys and other places where they don't want them. The company removes the animals and closes up openings so they won't get in again.

To do this effectively requires a system for logging calls, dispatching staff to them, adjusting schedules as needed and recording the work done. Two previous attempts hadn't provided that, Dowd said.

In the 1990s, Humane Wildlife tried a custom-designed system to manage its service calls. "It failed miserably," Dowd recalled, because only the software designer could fix problems, and if he wasn't available when something went wrong, the business ground to a halt.

Next Dowd tried a software package designed for companies that service air-conditioning systems. The needs seemed similar - the system managed residential service calls - but there were too many differences. One difference, Dowd noted, is that getting and keeping a family of raccoons out of an attic often takes two or three visits, whereas repairing an air conditioner usually takes one.

The package also didn't integrate well with Business Objects SA's Crystal Reports, which Humane Wildlife Control was using for reporting, or with the company's Microsoft applications.

So Dowd turned to [Integrated Business Intelligence Corp.](#), a Hamilton-based reseller and Microsoft partner, which recommended Dynamics CRM Small Business Edition.

The Microsoft package was a good fit for a small, growing business without in-house information technology staff, said Garnet Lasby, chief executive of Integrated Business Intelligence, plus it integrated with other Microsoft software better than any alternative and offered a user interface familiar to anyone who uses Microsoft Outlook.

To implement Dynamics CRM, Humane Wildlife Control needed to install a new server - a Dell PowerEdge machine running Windows Small Business Server 2003 Premium Edition "because it ships with SQL, which is required for the CRM," Lasby said.

At the same time, Humane Wildlife equipped field supervisors with tablet PCs, which they use as sales aids. Now an employee can take a digital photo on a homeowner's roof, transfer it to the tablet PC and show the customer what needs doing - a hole that needs to be patched or screened to stop animals entering the building, for instance.

The company also gave all its field staff BlackBerry mobile devices from Research in Motion Inc., so they can send and receive e-mail wherever they are. These connect to the CRM system, so Humane Wildlife Control office staff no longer have to call field staff at home in the evenings to give them their next days' assignments, and field staff can confirm service calls in a matter of minutes, allowing the company to give its customers much quicker responses.

Humane Wildlife Control sounds typical of small to medium-sized businesses that have been adopting Dynamics CRM since Microsoft introduced Version 3.0 of the software late in 2005, said George Goodall, an analyst at [Info-Tech Research Group](#) in London, Ont. Goodall said the latest version of Microsoft's formerly lackluster CRM product is making market headway, mainly among smaller businesses that use other Microsoft software and are buying it on the recommendation of VARs and integrators.

According to Goodall, Microsoft got off to a slow start in the CRM market. "The first release was a dog, it was really a terrible product," he said. "Microsoft hadn't really thought out what they were doing." Version 1.1 was not a lot better, he said, but Version 3.0 is "really a much stronger product. It was really much more in line with what we've seen the other vendors doing."

Lasby said Microsoft's CRM offering is doing well, particularly among smaller companies with no existing sales force automation tools in place, and he expects to do lots of business with it this year.

As for Dowd, he said now that Humane Wildlife Control has a reliable and efficient system for managing its service calls, he can expand much more rapidly into new markets. Sales have increased 20 per cent since the company implemented Dynamics CRM, he said, and after taking 15 years to grow to a fleet of 15 trucks in the field, he hopes to add 15 more through entry into new markets this year.

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