

The Key Ingredient for Strong, Insightful Financial Management

Creative Dining Services

Challenges

The Key Ingredient for Strong, Insightful Financial Management

Creativity, collaboration, innovation, flexibility and quality — those are some of the characteristics by which Creative Dining Services defines itself. Founded in 1990 by two colleges dissatisfied with the caliber of university food service contractors, Creative Dining has grown exponentially over nearly 30 years. Today, the Michigan-based food service and hospitality provider employs 1,800 individuals and serves over 70 client locations across 12 states, including higher education institutions, senior living facilities, corporations, conference venues and more.

Yet until 2017, Creative Dining's accounting practices didn't match the high caliber of its customer-centric food service offerings. Prone to frequent crashes, QuickBooks was poorly suited to scale with the company's rapid growth. Creative Dining staff at client locations spent hundreds of hours each week manually entering data into Google Sheets to produce P&L reports, which would then need to be reconciled against financial data in QuickBooks managed by corporate accounting. Frustration among finance personnel was high. Plus, the company found it increasingly difficult to hire programmers with the specialized skills needed to maintain a homegrown accounts payables system.

"The company had grown too big for QuickBooks," said Jeff Banaszak, who spearheaded a move to modern, cloud-based financial management upon joining Creative Dining as CFO in 2016. "Creative Dining planned to continue growing rapidly and we knew we needed a new accounting system." After evaluations against NetSuite and others, Creative Dining selected Sage Intacct as its financial management platform based on its straightforward customizability, flexibility, rich reporting, affordability and ease of use. Top ratings on the G2 Crowd software reviews website and Sage Intacct's endorsement by the AICPA were also influential in Creative Dining's decision.

Solutions

Huge Efficiency Gains Free Staff for Higher-Value Work

Creative Dining, with about \$100 million in annual revenue, is reaping massive time savings of an estimated 18,875 hours a year since Maner Costerisan, a leading Sage Intacct partner, implemented the cloud-based solution. The bulk of that saving results from eliminating 350 hours a week of manual data entry into Google Sheets by staff at the 70 client locations, which gives them new time to focus on front-of-house customer service and culinary support. In addition, corporate accounting is saving 10 hours a week by no longer manually reconciling data from Google Sheets. Another 17.5 hours of weekly work is saved by automating cash management of credit card and cash transactions. Roughly \$20,000 a year is saved with automated invoice approval workflows through Sage Intacct, avoiding the need for a third-party application.

CREATIVE DINING SERVICES[®]
Complete Hospitality Management

Company Overview

Founded in 1990, Creative Dining Services had a different focus from the start: to serve as a transparent hospitality services provider with the goal of becoming an integral part of their client's community through flexibility, customization and adaptation. Since then Creative Dining Services has grown to serve over 70 clients, including Fortune 100 companies, colleges and universities, full service retirement communities, conference venues and others. To learn more, visit www.creativedining.com.

Executive Summary

Previous Software:

- Intuit QuickBooks

Results with Sage Intacct:

- Eliminated 350 hours a week of manual accounting work at 70 client locations
- Accounting department reduced staffing costs by 20%
- AR collections time reduced by 12%, driving \$760,000 in improved cash flow
- Dashboards and real-time data enable informed business decisions

THE KEY INGREDIENT FOR STRONG, INSIGHTFUL FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

On top of those savings, Creative Dining was able to reduce the finance team from five to four individuals by not filling a vacated position, thanks to the greater efficiencies realized with Sage Intacct, including accelerating the monthly close from 10 to five days. As a result, morale has soared across Banaszak's team. "Quite frankly, we saved the morale of our accounting department," the CFO said. "Rather than having 25% turnover each year, now everyone wants to stay due to the wonders of using Sage Intacct and the ideas we have for the future." And at a time when it's difficult to find good accountants, Creative Dining is luring top young talent. "We're attracting millennials to do our accounting and finance work now," Banaszak said. "Young accounting professionals are expecting a modern system like Sage Intacct, and they love it. They feel like they're on the cutting edge and can innovate with new ideas."

With huge time savings, a flexible platform and energized staff, Banaszak's team is able to pursue higher-value initiatives and better partner with the business to drive continued growth. For instance, each accounting team member now collaborates as a "finance lead" with on-site food service directors and staff to advise on financial performance, cost reductions and best practices. That's raising the financial savvy of the food service directors and managers, who use Sage Intacct dashboards to transparently share key metrics and detailed transactional reports with client personnel, building customer satisfaction and long-term loyalty.

Results

Fast, Informed Decisions with Real-Time Data

Site-specific Sage Intacct dashboards give on-site food service directors an array of vital information and key metrics, including invoices due. Those timely invoicing insights prompted a 12% improvement in accounts receivable collections, increasing yearly cash flow by \$760,000. Dashboards are also set up for regional directors and two operational VPs, providing real-time visibility into key metrics such sales, income, expenses and more. That's eliminated weeks of waiting to review monthly performance figures and enables faster, more informed decision-making.

"Moving to Sage Intacct has dramatically improved communication within our company," Banaszak said. "For example, we opened a new location in Detroit serving GM and within a few weeks noticed costs not in line with budget. We made quick decisions to get performance back on track." Collaboration has improved as well. Banaszak has been working closely with the VP of operations and VP of sales on new ideas and solutions based on accurate, unified data, which wasn't possible in Creative Dining's previous environment. Banaszak is especially pleased with the ease of dashboard creation in Sage Intacct: "We created the dashboards ourselves, and that's super valuable that we didn't have to hire a firm to help us."

Banaszak believes that Sage Intacct is the ideal platform to support Creative Dining's continued growth, which has seen the number of client locations increase by nearly 20 in the past three years. Most of all, the accounting and finance team is now able to uplevel its role into that of a strategic advisor, rather than routine transactional work. "Before, accounting and finance was a hindrance to growth," Banaszak said. "We've become a strategic partner to the business since adopting Sage Intacct. We now have a creative back-office system to match our creativity at the front of the house."

"We're seeing massive savings due to the automation we've accomplished with Sage Intacct. And rather than crunching numbers all day, we are seen as strategic business advisors to our client location units."



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