

SOLUTIONS

Microsoft Dynamics

Addressing Business Needs of Media Companies with Microsoft Dynamics GP and InterDyn **/Media Aspects'** DynamicsADvantage

White Paper

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<http://www.microsoft.com/businesssolutions>



Abstract

This white paper addresses the business decision makers in media companies—online and print publishers, providers of magazines, subscription products and services, broadcast and cable stations, and other businesses in the media market segment. This paper discusses how a software solution from Microsoft, Microsoft® Dynamics™ GP, complemented by a product from a Microsoft partner, InterDyn/Media Aspects, can address urgent business concerns specific to the media industry. With Media Aspects' assistance, media companies can replace costly, disparate software systems and enhance their business operations with technology that lets them streamline processes, improve efficiencies, and improve profitability.

Table of Contents

[Introduction: Media Companies at a Technology Threshold](#)

[Technology to Advance Business](#)

[Microsoft Dynamics GP, a Complete Business Management Solution](#)

[Role of the Microsoft Partners in Implementing Microsoft Dynamics GP](#)

[Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, Media Aspects](#)

[Critical Business Issues for Media Companies](#)

[Evolving Business Models and Other Challenges in the Way Media Companies Do Business](#)

[Complex Revenue Recognition](#)

[Tracking the Relationships between Advertisers and Agencies](#)

[Event Management and Tracking of Results from Events](#)

[Bundling](#)

[Issues Caused by Disparate Business Information Systems](#)

[Direct Costs and Immediate Impacts](#)

[Compromised Service Quality and Poor Customer Relationships](#)

[Weakened Organizational and Individual Productivity](#)

[The Media Aspects **Strategy for Media Companies' Success**](#)

[Media Aspects DynamicsADvantage, a Complement to Microsoft Dynamics](#)

[The Proof: Tangible Customer Benefits](#)

[Technological Advantages](#)

[Advanced Reporting and Insight](#)

[Business Process Benefits](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[For More Information](#)

Introduction: Media Companies at a Technology Threshold

Media and Entertainment businesses operate in a highly competitive, volatile market that in the last few years has seen significant changes. Leading companies have merged or changed their business model, and the continuing evolution of online businesses has resulted in new complexities of doing business while offering new revenue opportunities. With the increasing emergence of mobile consumer technology for the distribution of media and advertising and intense, competitive pressures on traditional print and broadcast companies, technological innovation continues to shape the way media companies compete and succeed.

However, many media companies have not been able to update their infrastructure in the face of rapid change. Many of these businesses **use older business software systems that don't always meet** contemporary requirements for financial and business management. Following mergers, acquisitions, and reorganizations, many media and entertainment companies find themselves using the different, disparate systems formerly used by separate businesses, making strategic decision-making and smart management difficult. Other companies, under financial pressure from reduced customer spending, are searching for ways to reduce cost to help ease financial pressures.

While the executives at media and entertainment companies tend to be well aware of the limitations of their current business technology, they are cautious in considering a replacement of the software systems. Company-wide software changes can be extremely costly in both financial and operational terms, **disrupting productivity and distracting from a company's goals. In addition, there are not many software solutions that take the unique requirements of the media industry into consideration.**

Technology to Advance Business

Microsoft offers a wide range of business management software products that lend themselves to adoption by businesses in many industries. Microsoft has also created a global network of technology partners with expertise in specific market segments and industries. The following pages introduce Microsoft® Dynamics™ GP, a richly featured business management solution, and InterDyn/Media Aspects, the Microsoft partner who uses Microsoft Dynamics products to help media and entertainment companies streamline and accelerate the way they operate.

Bringing roughly twenty years of collective experience working with clients in the media and entertainment industry, InterDyn/Media Aspects fully understands the operational and financial challenges that many media companies face. Media Aspects business and technology specialists can implement Microsoft Dynamics GP, enhanced by a software product called DynamicsADvantage, created by Media Aspects, for media and entertainment companies who want to turn their challenges into opportunities. Media Aspects can demonstrate that its clients derive tangible, strategic benefits from the technology it delivers. These benefits include improved team productivity, less costly and more profitable business processes, and advanced, flexible business analytics and corporate decision-making that allow a company to build market leadership and outperform the competition.

As you consider the value of Microsoft Dynamics GP together with InterDyn/Media Aspects's **industry** expertise for your own organization, please use the listing of resources and contact information at the end of the paper to pursue evaluating the solution in a practical manner.

Microsoft Dynamics GP, a Complete Business Management Solution

Microsoft Dynamics GP, formerly known as Microsoft Business Solutions–Great Plains®, is a richly featured business management and enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution that can benefit almost any aspect of business operations. Capabilities available in Microsoft Dynamics GP include financial management, business analytics, supply chain management, human resource management, and more. The solution features a modular, flexible design, which means that customer organizations activate and use just that functionality which is of value to them. Customers using Microsoft Dynamics GP engage in a wide variety of market segments and range from smaller, growing companies and business groups within larger corporations to enterprises with thousands of users and highly complex processes and technology requirements.

Microsoft Dynamics GP works like and integrates closely with other Microsoft products and technologies such as the Microsoft Office System business productivity applications and Microsoft SQL Server™ 2005 database and analytical application. Companies can easily store, manage, and access all business information in a single repository. Since Microsoft Dynamics GP offers a familiar, comfortable user interface, workers can become familiar and productive with the solution very quickly.

Version 9.0 of Microsoft Dynamics GP is the result of extensive research, including 1,500 customer interviews. Version 9.0 provides significant enhancements in the areas of usability, business analytics, supply chain management, financial management, and project accounting. Offered in two editions, Professional and Standard, Microsoft Dynamics GP 9.0 gives businesses a long-term, efficient business management infrastructure that allows them to thrive and grow in the ways they want to.

Role of the Microsoft Partners in Implementing Microsoft Dynamics GP

Businesses implement Microsoft Dynamics GP with the assistance of a Microsoft Dynamics partner. Typically, a partner helps the customer organization assess business and technical requirements, install and configure the product, train the users, convert data, build interfaces, and customize the solution where necessary. Following a software implementation, many partners offer continuing support for the solution. **Microsoft is firmly committed to supporting businesses' success in many industries and market segments, and it is in this regard that partners assume a critical role: Microsoft partners have deep expertise in a chosen market segment or industry, and many of them have developed their own software solutions that integrate with Microsoft Dynamics GP and extend the solution's capabilities with functionality to meet specific business needs.** When customers engage with a partner who also contributes **many years' expertise** and a targeted, complementary solution to Microsoft Dynamics GP, they have the assurance that the resulting implementation fully meets their success criteria for business management technology and can create tangible operational and financial returns on the investment.

Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, InterDyn/Media Aspects

One such partner is InterDyn/Media Aspects. InterDyn/Media Aspects specializes in implementing and supporting Microsoft Dynamics solutions, and also offers systems engineering, business process consulting, and application development. InterDyn/Media Aspects is a Gold Certified Microsoft Business Solutions Partner and a Microsoft Certified Business Solutions Education Center. With a headquarters in New York City and 22 other locations across the United States, InterDyn/Media Aspects maintains a powerful delivery infrastructure for solutions and services.

Extending the reach and value of Microsoft Dynamics solutions, InterDyn offers specifically designed software products and targeted expertise in a number of focus areas:

- Financial services
- Healthcare
- High-tech
- Hospitality
- Manufacturing
- Media and publishing
- Not-for-profit
- Professional services
- Public sector
- Real estate
- Trade

Specifically, Media Aspects focuses on the media and publishing vertical and DynamicsADvantage can increase the effectiveness of Microsoft Dynamics solutions to address the unique billing needs of the media industry such as, insertion orders, subscription orders, conference/event billing (sponsor/exhibitor, web seminars) contract management (bundling of products and services).

Critical Business Issues for Media Companies

In recent years, the media industry has experienced a gradual, yet consistent shift in spending from traditional print and broadcast media to several newer alternatives. An ever-increasing portion of the overall media spending is shifting to cable and satellite TV, online products and services, and, more recently, pod casting. Pod casting exemplifies the challenges to the more traditional revenue model—such as that used by many radio stations—by newer avenues that offer satellite radio, download services like **Apple’s iTunes, and other music and video download services**. Traditional and newer media companies are responding to these changes in consumer spending in different ways.

While most of the more traditional media companies have developed strategies to diversify their business models and take advantage of changed spending trends, these strategies take time to evolve. The more traditional media companies may not necessarily be the first to reach the market with a new approach. In consequence, many traditional print and broadcast companies have suffered shrinking revenues and margins.

Newer media companies with business models that incorporate the new delivery channels benefit from the changes in the industry. The revenues and profits of such companies may grow 100 percent and more per year. With fast, intense growth, these companies need to adjust their business models and processes to make sure they can continue to benefit from the changing and emerging opportunities.

New and traditional media companies experience challenges in two, closely related areas: the changing business model and ways of doing business, and the limitations of disparate software systems that don’t reflect media companies’ requirements.

Evolving Business Models and Other Challenges in the Way Media and Entertainment Companies Do Business

Media companies often adopt complex business models as they pursue a range of revenue vehicles. For example, several revenue generation strategies may exist concurrently within a media publishing company, including revenue from the sale of printed products, advertising revenue, subscription-based products, and online products or services. Many publishing organizations also license content and intellectual property from other businesses, activating yet another set of complexities related to the revenue model.

Relatively recent changes in legislation allow large media companies to own media properties in the print and broadcast markets. These media conglomerates need to decide whether they should consolidate all business units into a single set of business management systems or allow the business units a higher degree of autonomy, but deploy software tools to gather and consolidate business information for purposes of reporting and analysis. Often, a parent organization will try to move all of its business units to the same or similar software systems. However, realizing such complex changes on a vast scale can be highly challenging, resulting in a hybridization of business models within a large company. For example, in the case of Viacom, certain business units might have belonged together from the perspective of the similarity in their revenue models, and also share business software requirements. However, these business units might have needed to be separate from the standpoint of how the leadership saw those business units aligning in the future. Eventually, the company split along the lines of future strategies.

Issues Caused by Disparate Business Information Systems

Many successful media companies have experienced enormous growth over the last several years, but their information and business management systems have not always scaled to support that growth. Legacy solutions may not always be able to scale to accommodate larger numbers of customers and transactions or wide variation in revenue sources and revenue recognition requirements. As mentioned, it is not unusual for media companies to maintain several separate systems, even on different technology platforms. For example, they may have one system for tracking advertising or subscription orders and revenue, another for sales reporting, and yet **another for the company's general ledger and financial reporting**.

Financial and other information in these disparate systems may partially overlap and would need consistent reconciliation, but accomplishing that consistency would require a significant investment of time and effort. For that reason, business information may not be as dependable or current as would be desirable. Forecasting and reporting may not be reliable and comprehensive enough to inform wise business decisions and help business executives direct their organizations for best results.

Direct Costs and Immediate Impacts

Disparate systems unable to follow **a company's business strategy and growth path can be extremely costly**. Companies incur the direct costs of support and maintenance from the IT group and the lengthy training of new hires on the business systems. Less direct, but nonetheless painful costs can result from a lack of business intelligence, as the systems may not allow a company to gain insight into changing customer behaviors in real time, but only after the fact. If, for example, customers change their advertising or subscription patterns, it is critical for a media company to be aware of these events as they unfold, or the company may lose revenue or market share.

Compromised Service Quality and Poor Customer Relationships

When **business systems don't make important information easily available**, customer service levels may also suffer. Instead of answering a customer question immediately on the phone, a company representative may have to ask the customer to wait, research the information, and contact the customer again. System-generated obstacles in obtaining information may also cause financial concerns when, for example, collections are concerned. A company with disparate business systems may find it challenging to maintain efficient collections because **a collector's ordering and billing source data is stored in a system the collector does not have access to**. In that case, customers may underpay without ensuing correction, or they may receive an erroneous, hard-to-resolve over-billing.

Weakened Organizational and Individual Productivity

Managers and workers in a company work with the tools at hand. If the business systems include disparate tools and databases, that is what people will use, even if that means they will need to enter and track information in several systems, duplicating functions. In that case, interdepartmental collaboration and communications may not be as swift and productive as would be best for the business.

Organizational and individual productivity may suffer. Executives and the business groups they head may formulate decisions and pursue business strategies without being in synch with the entire organization. **Business systems that don't help people and groups connect and collaborate efficiently may result in worker burnout and cause technology fatigue, making it harder to justify additional investments in software and hardware.**

Complex Revenue Recognition

Media businesses need to be able to project the income from all their revenue sources with a high degree of certainty, track and recognize the revenue at the proper time, and analyze and improve the performance of the various revenue generators. Industry-typical complexities arise when companies invoice their customers on a different schedule than the one they follow in recognizing revenues. The products or services may be delivered via printed magazines, newsletters, newspapers, broadcast commercials via TV or radio, cable-transmitted commercials, online properties, or other products or services whose delivery **adheres to a different schedule than a customer's payments**. For example, a media company may invoice and receive payment twice a year for a certain product, but proper revenue recognition requires that revenue be *recognized* at the end of each month, based on actual product delivery. In such cases, media companies also need the flexibility to trace billing and revenue back to the original transaction, even though the schedules for each do not align.

Tracking the Relationships between Advertisers and Agencies

The relationships and transactions between advertisers and advertising agencies often require close tracking by media companies. Media companies selling ads, subscriptions, or services to clients, most likely receive orders for these deliverables **directly from the advertisers or through the advertisers' ad agencies** acting on behalf of advertisers.

In addition, an advertising agency may represent several advertisers and an advertiser may use several ad agencies. In order to have full transparency of the business transactions performed by an agency on behalf of several advertisers or by an advertiser using varying agencies, companies require software applications that have been designed specifically with these relationships in mind. Media companies will want to use these systems for such tasks as applying cash and credits, and tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) with a high level of flexibility.

An additional complexity comes into play when media companies themselves own or jointly own a revenue-generating advertising agency business unit.

Event Management and Tracking of Results from Events

During recent years, in an effort to create a competitive distinction, reach new audiences, and operate more profitably, many media companies have added further complexity to their revenue model by offering events. These can be Web seminars, pod casts, and online meetings, as well as actual trade shows or conferences. Revenue from the advertising, sponsorships, and attendance fees generated by these events can be difficult to manage and account for with non-specialized financial management software tools.

Bundling

Often, media companies contract with customers for products and services across multiple revenue models. For instance, a customer may contract with a media company for a magazine campaign, an online campaign, and a series of events. All these activities may be associated with the launch of a new product or strategy. In this case, the customer may want to execute a contract with one person or department at the media company. Media companies operating in a traditional manner will need to enter contracts and related insertion orders into several, disparate systems. In consequence, they will not be able to produce the consolidated billing, status reporting, and analysis that customers require.

The Media Aspects **Strategy for Media Companies' Success**

For almost twenty years, Media Aspects has been active in the media industry, supporting clients, observing industry developments, and developing strategies for businesses to succeed. Media Aspects clients include digital media and online publishers, media subscription companies, book publishers, television and radio broadcast and cable companies, media buying ad agencies, and more. Media Aspects has been successful at helping these companies navigate and thrive.

Media Aspects consultants are strongly committed to understanding their clients' needs with a high degree of professional empathy and by designing effective, targeted solution approaches for them. In its consultative approach, Media Aspects helps clients address key business issues, including:

- Company growth objectives
- Increasing operational efficiency in all lines of business across the organization
- Determining the ROI of technical and marketing investments
- Gaining corporate consensus and support
- Project planning, execution, and performance

Media Aspects also provides several specialized consulting services to media companies:

- **Strategy development:** Media Aspects consultants identify and assess market opportunities, initiate business concept development, and examine past investments to determine available resources and best areas of focus to generate continuous revenue growth.
- **Organizational development:** Media Aspects coaches and counsels company leadership, facilitates team development and change management, assists with creating vision and values, and addresses development needs in specific areas of business such as client relations, business intelligence, and lead qualification.
- **Acquisition advisory services:** Media Aspects experts review and validate possible acquisitions and mergers to arrive at an accurate understanding of the possible results of these activities and address succession and continuity issues in business operations and financial management.
- **Technology assessment and integration:** Media Aspects delivers a comprehensive evaluation and **opportunities of improvement in a company's approach to auditing and regulatory compliance**, including data security, best practices, audit preparation, and Sarbanes-Oxley compliance.

Media Aspects DynamicsADvantage, a Complement to Microsoft Dynamics

Within its holistic approach to addressing media clients' business and technology concerns, Media Aspects has built DynamicsADvantage, a software module that complements Microsoft Dynamics GP. The DynamicsADvantage has been integrated to Microsoft Dynamics CRM for several clients. The solution will soon integrate with Microsoft Dynamics AX, and other business management solutions from Microsoft. The design of the DynamicsADvantage module considers the specific challenges of media companies. DynamicsADvantage integrates so closely with Microsoft Dynamics GP that most users are not aware that they are using an additional product. User interface and navigation are completely consistent with Microsoft Dynamics GP.

Functionality included in DynamicsADvantage includes:

- Advertiser and Agency relationship in A/R
- Revenue forecasting and consolidated billing
- Digital Media Order to billing management with integration to traffic system
- Ad Billing and brand management
- Complete contract management from proposal to insertion order to charge management
- Flexible, Configurable pricing via rate cards
- Comprehensive Billing:
 - Billing schedule
 - Pre billing reporting;
 - Ad Hoc billing;
 - Pre-payment, ProForma invoicing
- Comprehensive Revenue Recognition:
 - Revenue schedule
 - Revenue forecasting
 - Deferred revenue

The user interface DynamicsADvantage offers looks much like that of Microsoft Dynamics GP and will be quickly familiar to people working with the module. Figure 1 compares the Microsoft Dynamics GP Customer Maintenance screen with the modified Customer Maintenance screen in the DynamicsADvantage module. The changes, driven by media industry needs, are highlighted.

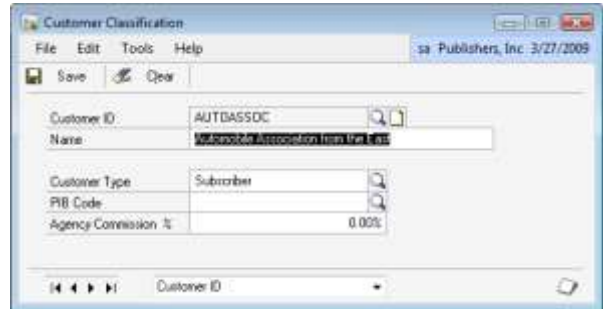
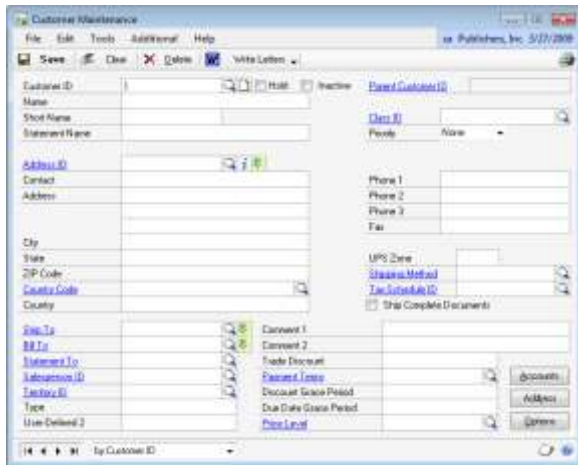


Figure 1. Microsoft Dynamics GP Customer Maintenance screen (left) and modifications in DynamicsADvantage (right).

DynamicsADvantage also provides a Customer Relationship screen, illustrated in Figure 2. Both *Customer ID* and *Bill to* are customer accounts.

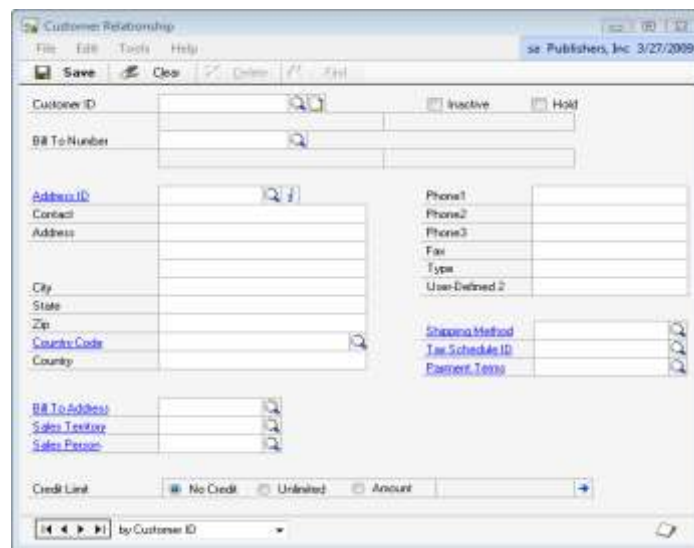


Figure 2. DynamicsADvantage Customer Relationship screen.

Figure 3 illustrates Microsoft Dynamics GP Receivables Transaction Entry in comparison to DynamicsADvantage Modified Receivables Transaction Entry. Again, the Microsoft Dynamics GP screen capture is on the left, the DynamicsADvantage screen capture on the right.

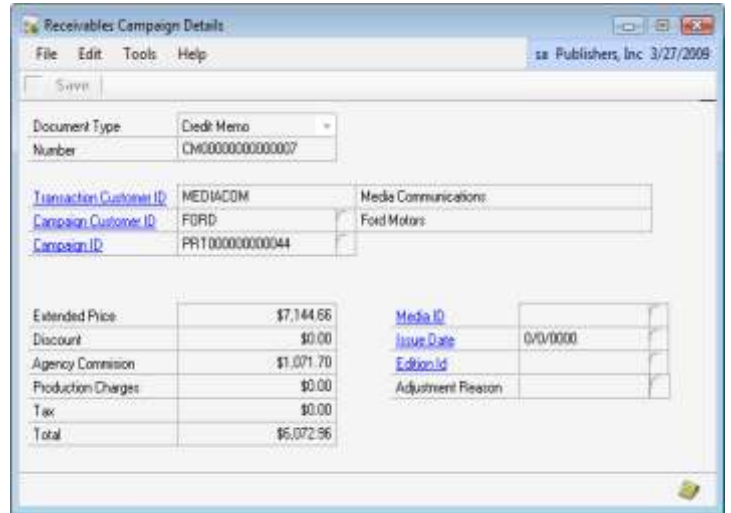
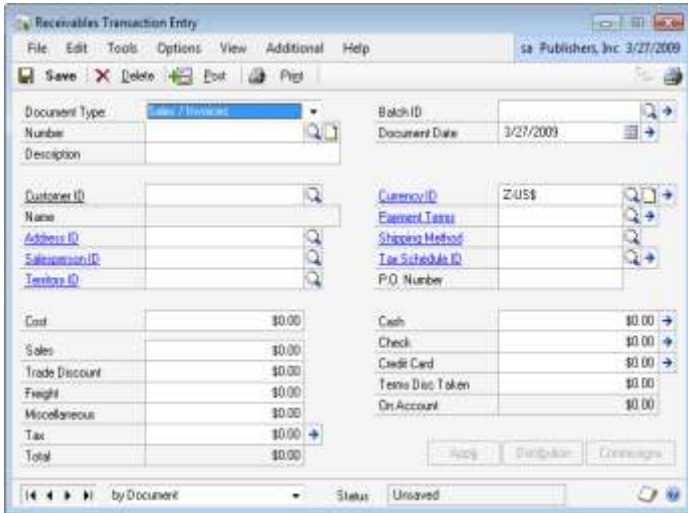


Figure 3. Microsoft Dynamics GP Receivables Transaction Entry (left) and DynamicsADvantage Modified Receivables Transaction Entry (right).

Microsoft Dynamics GP Sales Transaction Entry is extended in DynamicsADvantage with DynamicsADvantage Insertion Order Entry (see Figure 4) to give media companies' sales departments the ability to record such details as media ID, contract ID, agency commissions, products charges, and other important information.

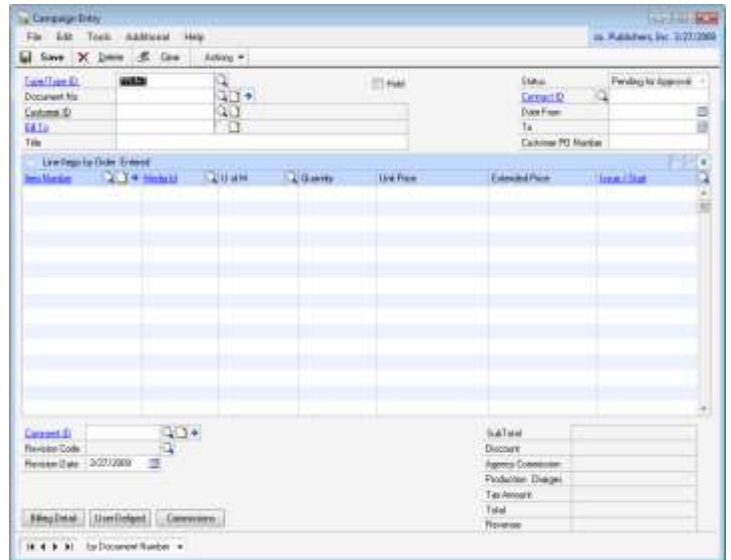
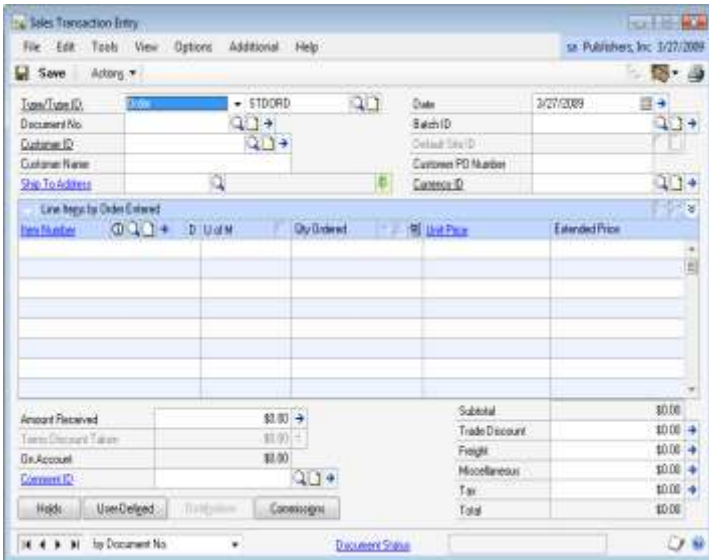


Figure 4. Microsoft Dynamics GP Sales Transaction Entry (left) and DynamicsADvantage Insertion Order Entry (right).

Similarly, DynamicsADvantage amplifies Microsoft Dynamics GP Sales Transaction Entry with line expanded (Figure 5, left) with DynamicsADvantage Insertion Order Entry with line expanded (Figure 5, right), making it possible to record and track industry-relevant data, including circulation numbers, Edition ID, agency commissions, discounts, and more.

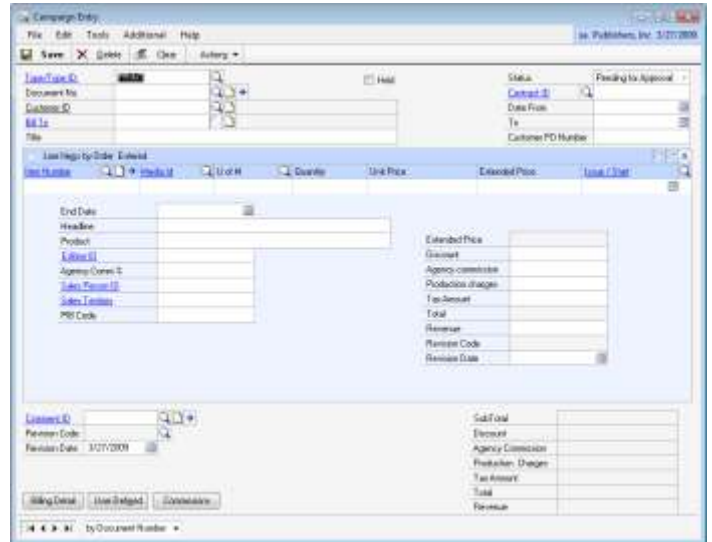
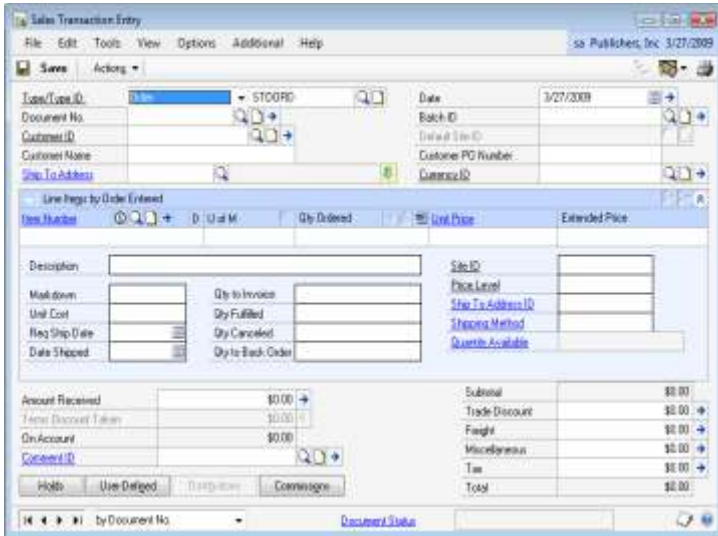


Figure 5. Microsoft Dynamics GP Sales Transaction Entry with line expanded (left) and DynamicsADvantage Insertion Order Entry with line expanded (right).

The Proof: Tangible Customer Benefits

For a number of its clients in the media industry, Media Aspects has successfully addressed many pressing business concerns and operational challenges discussed above, by rebuilding the business technology infrastructure based on an implementation of Microsoft Dynamics GP, often in integration with Media Aspects's DynamicsADvantage. When media companies acquire and implement Microsoft Dynamics GP together with **Media Aspects'** DynamicsADvantage, they can benefit from a streamlined, close-knit solution that helps them reap the best return on their investment in technology, skills, and processes. Media companies using this integrated solution have accomplished such compelling business results as annual savings of up to U.S.\$1 million and increased operational efficiency of up to 60 percent in certain departments. Benefits resulting from an implementation of Microsoft Dynamics GP and DynamicsADvantage most frequently fall into the areas of technology, business insight, and operations.

Technological Advantages

One single, integrated solution with a unified, familiar user interface replaces disparate systems on different technology platforms. As part of an implementation of Microsoft Dynamics GP and DynamicsADvantage, Media Aspects specialists can integrate the solution with Microsoft SQL Server 2005, the database and business analytics application, and Microsoft Office business productivity applications that people use every day. Often, the Microsoft Business Portal, which is based on Microsoft SharePoint® Portal Server 2003, is also a part of the deployment. In complex, integrated environments, Media Aspects may implement Microsoft BizTalk® Server 2005 to ensure smooth integration and interoperability of the business technologies at work. Typically, the entire infrastructure would run on the Microsoft Windows Server™ 2003 operating system.

In many instances, Media Aspects has replaced more costly, less flexible legacy systems, such as PeopleSoft, Oracle, and JD Edwards as ERP systems, and Admark or Ad Manager as insertion order processing, fulfillment, and billing systems, with the less expensive, more versatile, highly extensible, and broadly scalable Microsoft solution. For customers, the benefits of the integrated Microsoft infrastructure include less overhead for maintenance, support, and training, fast user adoption, flexibility to satisfy industry- and company-specific business requirements, and higher, faster return on the investment in technology, business processes, and skills.

Advanced Reporting and Insight

With a single, centralized source for all business data, executives, managers, and workers can access comprehensive, dependable information rapidly and use it in their business planning and decision-making. In addition, they can use the advanced reporting and analytical tools of Microsoft Dynamics GP and SQL Server 2005 to assess business developments, understand fluctuations in customer and market behavior, and adjust the business strategy.

With better business reporting and insight, a company will find it easier to maintain a competitive distinction and drive the marketplace proactively instead of being reactive to events. Financial managers can demonstrate more prudent and productive financial management, and facilitate regulatory compliance and successful audits with a high degree of assurance. With the ability to drill down into transactions, accounts, and other business information, managers can efficiently resolve issues and take wise action.

Business Process Benefits

Following an implementation, employees, especially customer-facing workers, can rely on the company's accurate, complete information to assist prospects, customers and business partners faster and more effectively, improving the company's service levels and customer retention. Using Microsoft Business Portal, a key component of Microsoft Dynamics GP, companies can even give customers and key business partners protected access to business information and functions through their browser. In this way, customers can, for example, look up account and transaction information directly.

Integration of the business management infrastructure also can make it much easier for a company's business groups and workers in distributed offices to exchange documents and information with ease, and collaborate efficiently with their colleagues through the company. For managers, an optimized infrastructure can increase the speed and effectiveness of managing the business performance of sales and marketing activities at a business group level or that of the individual representative or account.

Other operational benefits can include better resource utilization in the IT group, better organizational as well as individual productivity, and increased employee satisfaction resulting from a software environment that empowers people to accomplish their best.

Conclusion

Microsoft Dynamics is the new name for what was formerly called Microsoft Business Solutions. Microsoft Dynamics GP used to be called Microsoft Business Solutions–Great Plains in earlier versions of the product. These simple name changes highlight the direction Microsoft is taking its business management solutions; over the next few years, the individual enterprise resource planning (ERP) and customer relationship management (CRM) products will become one single, flexible, highly modular solution suite. Microsoft will continue to rely on partners like Media Aspects to extend the capabilities of its business management solutions to increase their value for businesses in specific industries and market segments.

As you consider Microsoft Dynamics and think about what goals it might help you achieve, remember **that the value of your investment in today's powerful products will be maintained and increased by Microsoft's long-term vision and unwavering commitment to research and development, backed up by significant resources.**

For More Information

- Learn more about Microsoft Dynamics: www.microsoft.com/businesssolutions/default.mspx
- Find out about Microsoft Dynamics GP: www.microsoft.com/dynamics/gp/default.mspx
- See what's new in version 9.0 of Microsoft Dynamics GP:
www.microsoft.com/BusinessSolutions/GreatPlains/product/90.mspx
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- Visit Media Aspects and Media Aspects : www.MediaAspects.com/index.htm and www.DynamicsADvantage.com
- Contact Media Aspects :
- Mitra Hooman, Managing Director
 - E-mail: Information@DynamicsADvantage.com
 - Telephone: 866-533-9114

Microsoft Dynamics is a line of integrated, adaptable business management solutions that enables you and your people to make business decisions with greater confidence. Microsoft Dynamics works like and with familiar Microsoft software, automating and streamlining financial, customer relationship and supply chain processes in a way that helps you drive business success.

U.S. and Canada Toll Free 1-888-477-7989

Worldwide +1-701-281-6500

www.microsoft.com/dynamics

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