REPLY

GROM:
cutting-edge technology for the taste of "ice cream like it used to be"

Abstract

Intuition, business flair, application of the "simple but crucial" principle and a solid friendship are the ingredients in the success of the GROM ice cream chain, one of the companies whose profile and expansion have epitomised the last decade. The most important thing for the two founders – who were twenty years old at the time - was not just an economic goal, but the concept of embracing an ideal: "to make the best ice cream in the world" – and never deviating from it. Organisational management, attention to people as well as to the product and to technology – not without a good dose of personal skills – has taken care of the rest.

Now the company is in a pattern of domestic and international growth that requires the right IT support. The recent introduction of Microsoft Dynamics AX 2009 has been a necessary and inevitable shift for GROM. The project has been entrusted to Cluster Reply, the Reply Group company specialised in consulting services and system integration in Microsoft technologies. The official launch, which happened in little more than eight months after the signing of contracts, involved all company areas and all the overseas firms connected to Gromart S.p.A..

Creating quality with ice cream

The production of artisan ice cream using a simple but crucial principle, shared by the world's best cooks: the sourcing of absolutely top quality raw ingredients.

And with this goal, Guido Martinetti and Federico Grom set off at the end of 2002 to scour Italy, from the Langhe down to Sicily, in search of the very best that Italy's food producers could offer. 18 May 2003 was the official launch date of the GROM ice cream parlour adventure: the doors of the first retail outlet opened in Piazza Paleocapa 1 in Turin.

The launch was a huge success and won them immediate acclaim. So, in January 2005, Guido Martinetti and Federico Grom invested a great deal of energy into a project to set up a production laboratory capable of satisfying the requirements of the newly opened GROM retail outlets.

They still have the same goal as before: to make every effort to offer the very best. Centralised production allows the maintenance of rigorous production standards; an impossibility if asked of individual ice cream makers in every single outlet. It also allows the sourcing of special fruit available from the best growers' coops in Italy, in preference to what is available in the general fruit and vegetable markets of each city. The preparation process of the 'basic' mixture by a team of expert staff is followed by an expedition to individual points of sale, where freezing is conducted on-site so that the product is always fresh.

That's how they achieved the flavours that have made GROM famous throughout Italy and the world: Sfusato lemons from Amalfi, Tonda Gentile hazelnuts from the Langhe, peaches from Leonforte, pistachios from Bronte, strawberries from Ribera and so on. Other, new flavours are being added to these in an ongoing search for constant perfection. In 2007 the first overseas retail outlet opened in New York (the event was marked by a full page GROM announcement in the New York Times).

Il gelato come una volta (*ice cream like it used to be*) became the slogan that identified GROM products all over the world, without any translation into other languages. In the artisan quality of the ice cream, which leans heavily on the culinary tradition for which Italy is famous abroad, there is a sign of pride in being Italian.

The GROM philosophy is based on customer satisfaction; customers who look to GROM for the taste of the best ice cream in the world, served by staff impeccably versed in retail skills. The whole structure is geared towards optimising the work done in the outlets, enhancing the satisfaction of the public and ensuring the success of the operation. Doing a job with passion and pride is the driving force behind their success.

The organisational ingredients of GROM's success

"The retail organisation is based on a very simple idea: the sharing of processes and activities within the processes at all points of sale, ensuring their uniformity at all outlets. The replication of activities. Creating the perfect activity, describing it, and replicating it. And the people – absolutely crucial – starting with the cone-server".

Federico Grom

IT ingredients

Information Technology has a key role in the organisation of a company that is spread out over domestic and international territory and has had rapid growth that is still continuing. The choice of infrastructure and software applications able to support the specificities of the enterprise is based on the criteria of efficiency and effectiveness, with technologies selected largely in relation to their integrative facility and scalability.

SOFTWARE

"The introduction of Microsoft Dynamics AX 2009 has been a necessary and inevitable step for GROM. The company has a pattern of domestic and international growth that necessitates the right IT support, something the previous software couldn't manage", asserts Stefano Marsani, IT Manager for GROM. "An internal analysis process was begun early in 2009 and after a few months we were able to select MS Dynamics AX 2009 as the product best suited to current and future needs: rapid implementation, pliability in handling company processes, optional integration with software currently used by the company and with new instruments being introduced. The project was entrusted to **Cluster Reply**, a Reply Group company specialised in consulting services and system integration in Microsoft technologies. The official launch, which happened in little more than eight months after the signing of contracts, involved all company areas and all the overseas firms connected to Gromart S.p.A.. Its facility for integration with other software like the POS management system, business intelligence, treasury management or the labelling systems was one of the factors that influenced the company's decision. All the company processes have been improved by virtue of the new capabilities introduced by MS Dynamics AX 2009. By creating special connectors, this instrument ensures that all data from diverse company functions is made immediately available and ready for use within the company's operational and decisional processes".

THE WEB PORTAL

"A good part of the interaction processes between the outlets and the headquarters, " continues Marsani "has been improved by the creation of a web portal that allows all company activities to be conducted directly on Dynamics AX, autonomously and without the use of further instruments. The web platform now handles supply orders, delivery management, daily sales receipts and all other administrative tasks; This ensures that the use of data transmission lines is optimised and that the circulation of printed documentation is kept to a minimum".

VIRTUALISATION

"In order to reduce the number of new physical servers necessary for the creation of the new ERP infrastructure," says Marsani "we opted for the virtualisation platform Microsoft Server 2008 Hyper-V R2 used in clusters. This solution, using two blades similar to the previous ones but with 48 Gb of RAM apiece and with Windows Server 2008 R2 Data Center installed, enabled the creation of all the servers comprising the installation of the MS Dynamics AX 2009 environments. On these same blades, it was possible to use MS System Center Virtual Machine Manager 2008 R2 to migrate a good part of the physical or virtual servers previously used by the company, with the subsequent retiring of the old servers and a reduction in consumption and physical space needed. With regard to the management of cluster virtualisation, the use of Cluster Shared Volumes and Live Migration functions in Windows 2008 server R2 allowed the virtual servers to be shifted from one node to another without an interruption of service. This made high availability (HA) management even for machines that do not have native support of this type of management".

Cluster Reply, a Reply Group company, specialises in consulting services and system integration in Microsoft technologies and works alongside its clients in the execution of their projects, combining excellence and innovation with expertise in Microsoft applications, technologies and infrastructures. Thanks to its consolidated skills and experience, Cluster Reply can intervene at all stages in system design: from initial assessment to needs analysis, definition of architecture decisions, drafting of functional and technological requirements, to development, deployment and evolution of completed systems. Cluster Reply considers research and continual innovation to be an essential asset for the development of skills that can be transferred quickly to the market and can thus effectively support clients who introduce new Microsoft technologies. In particular, having previously worked with Microsoft in breaking through new frontiers such as BPOS (Business Productivity Online Services), Cloud Computing, applications based on Surface technology and new platforms emerging from Redmond like Windows 7, Office 14 and Azure, Cluster Reply is now ready to work alongside firms in implementing solutions that give an effective response to the ever-increasing need to optimise IT spending while maintaining quality, stability and security.

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