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Randers Tegl getting mobile functions to the frontline fast with Microsoft PowerApps

About Microsoft PowerApps

PowerApps is a set of apps, services, connections and data platforms. It is an environment where business users can build user-defined apps to suit the needs of their business fast. Using PowerApps, you can establish connections to company archive data either in the underlying data platform or in various data sources online and in the local environment (SharePoint, Excel, Office 365, Dynamics 365, SQL Server etc.)

Columbus laid the technical foundations for a solution that makes it easier to build new applications and mobile functions – and synchronize data with Dynamics 365 Finance & Operations.

"With PowerApps, I can test out ideas and offer the business new capabilities fast. Let's say we want to have our traveling consultants complete tasks while mobile, for example, instead of having to key in a whole mass of data when they get back to the office. Quite simply, we shorten the time between thinking and acting," says Jeanette Jensen, IT Coordinator at Randers Tegl. This family-owned business was founded in 1911 and today is one of Northern Europe's leading producers of bricks, with presence in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Germany and selling to practically the entire world.

This places demands on the digital infrastructure, which is why in 2019 Randers Tegl swapped out their outdated ERP solution for a cloud-based Microsoft Dynamics 365 Finance & Operations.

This helped to simplify operations as well as maintenance and ongoing update work, meaning the solution always has the latest capabilities and functionalities. However, the standard-based system also puts a limit on how much you can change yourself.

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They build the apps, Columbus handles the tech

"I don't actually have a technical background but I've been developing small applications and macros for several years. So when PowerApps came out, it turned out to be the obvious platform for building the functionalities we constantly need from our business solution," explains Jeanette Jensen.

She discussed the different possibilities with Columbus who have partnered with Randers Tegl on their ERP solution and who were curious about the practicalities of conceiving PowerApps and Dynamics 365 to an even greater degree. The result was a division of labor, with Columbus configuring and streamlining the technical architecture, while Jeanette Jensen builds apps.

"Columbus takes care of the heavy lifting in terms of the tech configuration beneath the surface – such as Azure and SQL Server – while I work with everything up top," she says.

"It's a win-win for everyone and our colleagues are really pleased with the solution"

The company's first PowerApp has just been released in a fully functional version that makes it easier for consultants to update or close tenders when they are out visiting customers. Previously, this was a heavily manual process and there was often significant lag on tenders that had been sent out but not updated.

"With the new PowerApp, consultants can tap in on their iPads and view, update or delete tenders while on a site visit to a customer. This means we can follow up on tenders way more closely and also gives us easy access to relevant knowledge – without consultants having to ring around and ask the office for information and statuses the entire time. We really have eliminated a bottleneck," she explains. In addition, everything is synced with Dynamics 365 any time changes are made on a sales consultant's iPad.

"The consultants don't have to enter stuff manually on the back end and in terms of admin, the app has managed in more or less one fell swoop to get a handle on an area that used to cause us a lot of grief. "It's a win-win for everyone and our colleagues are really pleased with the solution," adds Jeanette Jensen.

Randers Tegl's next PowerApp is also in the latter stages of development and will make it easier to open or update complaint tickets via mobile, and to add information or photos and sync with Dynamics 365. This will mean that consultants will no longer have to remember and input a whole mass of information when they get back to the office, and also minimizes the risk of vital information being lost along the way. All with a view to providing even better service and making cumbersome internal work processes even easier.

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New functions for the business without the need for coding

Jeanette Jensen has a handful of potential PowerApps projects that it only makes sense to initiate – and she expects there to be even more when she begins inviting the company itself to offer up suggestions.

"Building the two current apps was really simple. PowerApps is a modular and user-friendly environment where you don't need to write a single line of code. That makes it easy to build a new function that pushes tools and knowledge all the way to the front-line, much to the delight of colleagues across the company," she says.
Part of what made this possible was the fact that Columbus used a specially developed solution, the CBI Plugin.

The CBI Plugin made it possible to set up and manage the underlying Azure Database which, together with the Power Platform, makes it easy to work with PowerApps in a flexible and largely code-free environment. Which is exactly how Randers Tegl works with the platform.

Apps get their own environment – but get tested together with the rest of Dynamics 365

PowerApps has their own operating environment so they don't impact Randers Tegl's Dynamics 365 solution and its ability to stay consistently up-to-date. However, the company still includes them in its routine test cycle before patches and updates from Microsoft are implemented to make sure that they will all function as intended.

Jeanette Jensen describes collaborating with Columbus on PowerApps as constructive, fruitful and highly educational even if there were a few technical hiccoughs in the underlying environment along the way.

"There's a big difference between accessing a certain app via super-fast WiFi or using a small-scale 3G connection way out in the countryside. This has required additional optimization of the underlying environment and has also been a learning process for Columbus who offered extra hours to get everything in place," she says.

RANDERS Tegl

About Randers Tegl
The Randers Tegl Group is a family-owned business and one of Northern Europe's leading producers of bricks, with head offices and countless brickworks in Denmark, as well as in Sweden, Norway and Germany and selling to practically the entire world.

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Do you want to know more?

Contact us!

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About Columbus:

Columbus is a global IT services and consulting company with more than 2,000 employees serving 5,000+ customers worldwide. Columbus helps ambitious companies transform, maximize and futureproof their business digitally. We are specialized within the industries retail, distribution, food and manufacturing. We offer a comprehensive solution portfolio with deep industry knowledge, extensive technology expertise and profound customer insight. Columbus has offices and partners all over the world and we can deliver our solutions and services locally – on a global scale.

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