HARBOUR GROUP LEVERAGES AIM TO GAIN INSIGHT FROM YEARS OF HISTORICAL DATA

Harbour Group is a privately-owned operating company based in St. Louis with a long history of success in founding, acquiring, and building companies. Through its operating companies, Harbour Group is engaged in a wide variety of manufacturing, distribution, and specialty services in multiple industries. Founded in 1976, Harbour Group has acquired over 170 companies over the last 36 years.

For deal sourcing, Harbour Group relies heavily on intermediaries and, as a result, they invest heavily in maintaining relationships with those intermediaries. They also pay close attention to which intermediaries bring them the deals that best fit their criteria and how many deals they are seeing in each sector to ensure they are marketing to the right people and that their funnel of deals is wide enough to meet their goals. And finally, they track how many deals they see month-over-month and what their deal flow looks like relative to the market to ensure they continually see the deals that they need to see. After collecting deal sourcing data over three decades, they have amassed a substantial amount of data on the origination of their deals. Getting data out of the system in any meaningful or actionable form, however, proved to be an inefficient and time-consuming job for the Harbour team.

Harbour Group's Managing Director Zach Waltz found himself as the de facto database administrator for their old system. "We had the ability to do basic searches," he says, "but it was pretty ugly and we'd have to go to 4 different screens to get the information we wanted to build a usable report."

The system was also so complex that very few employees in the organization could use it effectively, so meeting notes were often entered manually, no one had real-time access to data, and there was no easy way to monitor how often their top-tier deal sources were contacted. And since Waltz was one of the few who could get data out of the system, he was often tasked with aggregating data, building reports, and querying SQL databases rather than

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"We needed a solution that would allow us to continue to capture the data that we had been capturing all along, but that also was more user-friendly and accessible."

When Harbour Group began researching new customer relationship management software solutions, they quickly narrowed in on Salesforce.com as a viable platform due to its flexibility, accessibility, and its reporting capabilities. They ultimately decided on AIM over Salesforce.com out-of-the-box and other Salesforce-based solutions. "We felt AIM was a great starting point and we could have it tailored to our specific needs as we got to know the system better and understood what it was able to do," says Waltz. "It saved us money relative to a full-blown customization, but had enough customization capabilities that we weren't stuck with an out-of-the-box product."

Waltz was also keen to leverage the expertise that Altvia brought to the table. "I was interested in the experience that Altvia has

with the wide variety of institutions they work with, and I was interested in incorporating some of that experience into what we're doing."

Initially, Waltz predicted that they would have two or three members on the team who would be regular users and others who would use the system sparingly or not at all. Not long after implementing, however, user adoption was unexpectedly high and Harbour Group began expanding the functionality of AIM to handle not just managing deal flow but also managing fundraising and relationships with lenders. Waltz credits the high user adoption to AIM's ease of use and efficiency. "The team recognized the need to keep track of what they're doing," says Waltz. "AIM is user friendly, it captures the information we need, and it keeps the team informed as to what is going on. Now we spend time analyzing data rather than compiling it."

Using AIM, Harbour Group improved visibility into their data and improved their efficiency in getting meaningful data out of the database, leaving the team to focus more of their time on high-value activities. Working with large amounts of historical data, they can see trends over time and efficiently determine what deal flow looks like, what deal sources are providing the best deals, and how current deal flow compares to the past. "We're looking at a lot of the same data but just getting at the data easier and giving more people more timely access to it," says Waltz. "We've taken data that had been captured in spreadsheets for years and turning it into useful information."

The team now has access to all of the information in the database whenever and wherever they need it. Says Waltz,"Things are pretty fluid in this business. When I'm on the road, I can't always plan a month or a week out. Now when someone cancels a meeting, I can schedule a new one and have all the information I need before I sit down in front of that potential customer. Before, we simply didn't have that access."

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