

# Kent Watersports

## The Company

"All of us here are passionate about watersports," says Sharon Zimmer, Corporate Vice President, Systems and Technology at Kent Watersports. "The company's ownership group has assembled some of the best-known brands in the industry and is committed to the success of each of the six independent companies that owns and markets them." Companies in the Kent Watersports family include: Absolute Outdoor, Connelly, HO Sports, Kent Sporting Goods, Liquid Force, and O'Brien.

## The Opportunity

Kent Watersports maintains a complex business model in a highly competitive market. The business owners, based in New London, Ohio, aim to effectively support each of the companies' efforts to offer the right products, through the right channels, at the right cost, to deliver desired revenue results. Accomplishing this requires a consolidated, real-time view of each company's finances and activities. The Kent Watersports companies, in turn, have to be able to productively manage their business activities and relationships, including distributors and contract manufacturers, or in the case of the companies that manufacture in the United States, optimize their materials management and manufacturing. To complicate matters, many business partners are located in different countries and time zones.

Following many years of growth and success among the Kent Watersports brands, the company's technology systems were unable to keep up. Eventually, they became difficult and costly to maintain and operate. Says Zimmer, "My task is to help our companies succeed through best IT practices. That demanded a technology upgrade. The legacy systems in the six companies had only minimal distribution and warehouse management capabilities. They were difficult to adjust to changing business needs and reporting was a cumbersome task. Any system change required custom programming, and employees often had to enter data repeatedly, causing errors. We decided to replace these technologies with a single ERP system for all companies to support manufacturing, financials, distribution, warehouse management, and other lines of business."

## enVista's Solution

As Kent Watersports evaluated enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions, the most critical criteria were a system that could run multiple companies and sites, and that offered multi-currency capabilities for international business. A selection committee with key leaders from each company reviewed in-depth demos from the three technology providers that most closely met their requirements: Apprise Software, Epicor, and Microsoft with Microsoft Dynamics AX.

"The three top vendors exceeded our functional requirements," explains Zimmer. "We wanted a solution that would stay current with evolving innovation from a vendor that was also a strong technology leader. With that in mind, we were ready to bet our future on Microsoft's vision and ability to remain a powerful technology leader."

Hands-on experience with the new Microsoft Dynamics AX confirmed the decision. "We were completely blown away when we saw what was possible with Microsoft Dynamics AX," notes Zimmer. "Microsoft is the partner for us and Microsoft Dynamics AX is the ERP system that can continue to move forward with us."

**"With Microsoft Dynamics AX, we will realize huge gains at each of our companies individually and from a consolidated standpoint. The wins will be obvious and very drastic."**

Sharon Zimmer,  
Corporate Vice President,  
Systems and Technology,  
Kent Watersports



Once the technology was selected, Kent Watersports decided to collaborate with enVista to manage the system implementation. A leading enterprise and supply chain consulting services firm and Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, enVista was selected for its significant distribution and warehouse management experience, as well as its considerable Microsoft Dynamics AX implementation and IT consulting experience.

To ease the transition, enVista's subsidiary, Appnuity, hosted a single instance of Microsoft Dynamics AX while the six companies come online with the new solution. The first deployment phase focused on distribution, warehouse management, sales, and financials. The second phase added manufacturing, payroll, and portals for customers and vendors.

enVista's IT consulting division, Appnuity, quickly deployed a hosted AX development environment to allow the project to start within days of contract signing. The team seamlessly integrated a hosted environment with Kent Watersport's existing network infrastructure.

The On Demand infrastructure allows Kent Watersports to add capacity on a moment's notice to accommodate seasonal or sustained growth. The sporting goods company also deployed an enterprise-class ERP using private cloud technology, without adding staff and with minimal operating capital. This strategy gives Kent Watersports the flexibility to keep the environment in a private cloud, or migrate to a premise-based solution.

Kent Watersports has engaged Appnuity's IT experts to fully manage and monitor its environment 24x7, allowing the sporting goods company's staff to focus on other, strategic projects. In concert with the ERP deployment, Appnuity deployed wireless infrastructure to Kent Watersports' Tyler, TX distribution center. This will enable Kent Watersports' staff to leverage mobile devices to manage warehouse operations, using enVista's enHanced Mobile WMS application.

To extend Microsoft Dynamics AX, Kent Watersports is adding RF technology in its distribution centers and specialized software to facilitate the electronic data interchange with key business partners.

## The Results

As the implementation of Microsoft Dynamics AX is underway, Kent Watersports expects a smooth adoption and many operational advantages. "Employees are incredibly excited about Microsoft Dynamics AX," Zimmer says. "They know that almost everything about the way they work will change for the better by using a comfortable ERP system that looks and feels like other familiar Microsoft applications, Excel and Outlook."

### **Simplify Technology Management, Reduce Cost of Technology Ownership**

For the IT team, working with Microsoft Dynamics AX means they will be able to efficiently translate business requirements into ERP system functionality and keep the costs of technology ownership low. "I can help more people and go home feeling like I really accomplished my job," says Zimmer. "In fitting Microsoft Dynamics AX to our business, there's nothing I can think of where I won't be able to say, 'Yes, we can make that happen.'" A small team of four IT professionals will support the solution and its users across the six Kent Watersports companies. Because the team has the skills to configure and manage the Microsoft technology, the company will no longer incur the delays and costs associated with custom programming by the rare contractors who knew their way around the legacy technologies. Says Zimmer, "Our team will be empowered to take action on opportunities to improve operations. For example, we will be able to reduce freight costs for our company and our customers because Microsoft Dynamics AX easily task interfaces with a more economical shipping service. This would have been almost impossible for some of our companies in the past."

### **Introduce Agility and Efficiency into Business Operations**

"By using Microsoft Dynamics AX, we have many different ways to gain efficiencies and improve operations," says Zimmer. "Because of this, we anticipate being able to grow and evolve without a lot of additional headcount." Examples of operational improvements include:



- **Effective business planning.** “Business owners will be able to comprehensively review brand performance, distribution channels, product positioning, financials, and more so that they can make adjustments and improvements at the corporate level, and within the individual companies,” Zimmer states. “Owners and managers can use executive dashboards and get practical, timely reports from the ERP system, whenever they like.”
- **Streamlined finance.** Financial managers look forward to a significant reduction in data entry and related errors, and the ability to greatly simplify financial reporting through consolidated financial management across all companies. “Most of the manual data entry will disappear from finance management,” Zimmer notes.
- **Connected distribution.** Using Microsoft Dynamics AX, Kent Watersports will integrate distribution with financials, manufacturing, and sales, eliminating many informal or individual processes with unprecedented control, consistency, and flexibility. This will enable more effective and efficient distribution management.
- **Control in manufacturing.** Manufacturing managers will leverage automated, streamlined tracking of such critical factors as work-in-progress, materials, and costs. “We find that Microsoft Dynamics AX can easily adjust to our business model, enabling us to incorporate best practices into our manufacturing processes,” notes Zimmer.
- **Enhanced sales effectiveness.** Representatives in the field who access Microsoft Dynamics AX through their tablet computers or smartphones will be able to enter and track orders while they meet with customers. Sales managers will more easily be able to observe and optimize sales activities.

### Make Key Relationships More Productive

Kent Watersports is setting up their ERP system to closely follow the business interests of customers and business partners. By using the portals in Microsoft Dynamics AX, distributors and retailers that purchase from the Kent Watersports companies will be able to check on order status, shipping details, invoicing, and other information, at any time and from any browser. Vendors will also be able to access a portal to provide their Kent Watersports clients with manufacturing, freight, or invoice updates, and importantly, order and shipping details. “Our customers and business partners around the globe will be able to immediately retrieve order information,” explains Zimmer. “Providing our vendors with instant access to order information and shipping details means we will be able to respond more quickly to our customers’ needs.”

For more  
information on  
enVista’s services,  
please call  
877-684-7700  
or contact  
inforequest@  
envistacorp.com