

IT's always the best at DLF

Here's a saga of a well-known infrastructure developer that has used technology to lay a strong foundation for all its ventures and processes.

DLF has pioneered townships and group housing in India and has to its credit over 224 million square feet of existing development projects and 748 million square feet of planned projects

62-year track record of growth, One strong principle 'To deliver the Best'. This mantra has helped DLF become synonymous with contemporary urban development and housing across the country. Recently DLF bagged Golden Peacock Award for excellence in Corporate Governance. It validates DLF's focus on following policies and processes which serve shareholders and stakeholders of the company in the best possible manner. Today, DLF Group is India's largest real estate company in terms of revenues, earnings, market capitalization and developable area. It has a 62-year track record of sustained growth, customer satisfaction, and innovation. DLF's primary business is development of residential, commercial and retail properties. The company has a unique business model with earnings arising from development and rentals. Its exposure across businesses, segments and geographies, mitigates any down-cycles in the market. "The landmark achievements so far have been on the merit of the synergistic strengths of good architecture, appropriate designs, impressive aesthetics and safety features that the firm has incorporated in each of its development projects," affirms Mahesh Mathur, Vice President-Systems, DLF Ltd.

Success determined by adopting Best Processes and Systems, and by leveraging IT

DLF's Management always favored in adopting the 'Best Processes and Systems' and strongly believed that right Information Technology adoption can prove to be a major differentiator in this competitive environment. To maintain a swift workflow, DLF kept developing different in-house IT applications as well. The company also deployed a well-known ERP package—Oracle Financial (a core financial module) for its corporate office, reveals Mathur. Yet, there was a problem.

Lack of integrated processes hampers growth

In the real estate business, today, success is determined by what exactly the company knows and when it knows. This solicits integrated information flow that can be accessed any time. With varied interests, and with the increase in DLF's physical locations, there was a pressing need for a unified/ integrated ERP application that could give a comprehensive view of the organizational operations, providing critical information, instantaneously. Though there were several software applications automating key business processes at DLF, they did wonderfully for their respective domains; yet they developed into islands of applications leading to duplication of data, factual discrepancies, and disjointed processes. There was also another area that needed immediate attention. As customers are engaged with DLF from the time they buy/procure a property on rent to the time they ultimately sell-off the property or vacate the rented accommodation... this is usually a pretty long span. So DLF needs to keep histories of all the transactions that take place with them during this period. But with their existing applications, the company was unable to keep track record/complete history of each customer on-the-fly. Besides, many a time it came across discrepancies in the data collated from different sources/ applications.

End-to-end ERP to grow & capitalize on future opportunities

To address these challenges, and to take fullest advantage of future opportunities, DLF management felt the need of a flexible information technology, ideally an end-to-end ERP that will integrate horizontally across business units as well as vertically through out each unit. By early 2006, DLF started exploring for a good ERP solution that could bring all processes on to a single platform. The management evaluated many options available in the market but after a careful analysis, zeroed down on Ramco's ERP solution. Mathur, Vice President (IT), DLF shares his experience: "While exploring different options we realized the complexities that existed at our end. Even Ramco didn't have a ready-made solution to address all of our challenges. But the technology that they were using put them in a better position to come up with a solution that now seems just perfect for our needs."

The daunting task

"To migrate 15 years of legacy data residing across the 710 companies, 853 organization units and 2210 finance books of DLF was a humongous task. But Ramco accomplished the daunting project successfully, dealing with each complexity head-on," says Sunderaraj, Sr. Vice President., Enterprise Solutions, India, Ramco Systems. Because this extensive and critical project would be required to automate most of the DLF's systems and processes, Ramco's team created detailed project plans, implementation strategies, and a blueprint for meeting requirements. They closely aligned themselves with DLF's business objectives and succeeded too. The project was implemented in multiple phases for various companies doing different businesses under the DLF brand. The first roll out happened in February 2007, and the implementation across the board for all modules got completed in May 2008.

Involving & Assuring employees

When implementing an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, DLF was aware of the fact that it may have to face unwanted attitude from its employee, the potential users. For one reason or another, they may resist the implementation process. So it decided to proactively deal with this problem instead of reactively confronting it. Hence it first sold internally the benefits and effectiveness of implementing Ramco's solution. Moreover DLF involved its workforce right from the beginning. Phased roll out / implementation of the ERP helped them to identify the users who needed to be convinced and addressed. "The effort paid off. After the second roll out there was a feeling of comfort within the organization...

over a 100 users were already using the application, so the next set of 50 users were not that uncomfortable as they had begun receiving a positive feedback from earlier users. The deployment now covers most of DLF's business processes" says Mathur.

Fruits of labor

As per Mathur, it is too soon to comment on the ROI as the implementation has been a very recent development; on the basis of the initial experience he observes that the deployment has helped DLF. But he is confident that "the solution has eliminated the operational/ data redundancies, enhanced the flow of information, and has thus significantly improved productivity and profitability. Sundar enumerates

some of the key functionalities that the ERP solution is offering: "The platform offers service billing, which includes the generation of bills for maintenance, water and electricity charges; mall leasing and corporate leasing; retail and residential sales; construction procurement and payables; promotional/deferred revenue billing, etc." The solution has been developed using Ramco Virtual Works 2.0 and SQL Server 2005. Ramco's Business Intelligence tool is also implemented in DLF for managing huge ERP data to reap the real system benefits. Now DLF is able to view its group's entire data across business segments through Ramco's Business Intelligence dashboard on single platform which helps in achieving the accurate analysis for taking prompt business decision. As regards the future, Mathur says that there are plans to have a few more implementations done, related to CRM (customer relationship management) added to the platform to enhance the management reporting and communication with customers. Mathur adds, "Of the 400 employees that we have, 300 are already working on some ERP module or the other. The count will go up further when the BI and CRM modules are deployed."



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Constructing the Future

DLF is an organisation that likes to keep pace with the times and do all that it takes to stay ahead and add to the goodwill that it has earned over the years. The key to its success lies in the fact that it keeps a tab on the needs of its stakeholders (which comprise business users, end users, and its workforce) and leverages IT to address these challenges and requirements. With this commitment to deliver nothing short of the best, we are sure DLF will continue to scale up further and touch even higher peaks of success. We wish them All the Best! ■