

College Pro Painters Limited

## Knowledge Management Solution Helps Paint a Promising Future

Published: TBD

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*College Pro and its sister company Action Window Cleaners have never made a point of resting on their laurels. In fact, senior management at the well-known franchises realized that updating their information technology (IT) infrastructure would not only help business run more efficiently, but it would also help them enhance customer service and help keep franchisees competitive. With this focus in mind, management chose to build a Digital Dashboard based on Microsoft technologies to help achieve their business objectives.*

*Since implementing this Knowledge Management solution, College Pro has revolutionized the way it works. With the means to better manage its operations and filter business critical information, the company is now communicating more effectively with its franchisees – providing them with the integrated online sales, training and administrative support they need to thrive. What's more, College Pro is positioning itself as a leading-edge corporation that is embracing technology with open arms.*

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### The Customer

Founded in 1971 by a Canadian college student, College Pro Painters Limited established its business based on a model of seasonal franchises run by college students. Since then, College Pro has evolved into the largest exterior residential painting company in North America with annual revenues of \$25 million (U.S.). The company employs 60 full-time staff that recruit, train and manage the company's more than 600 franchises.

College Pro operates in two languages, nine provinces and 30 states across North America. The company has head offices on both sides of the border, in London, Ontario and Boston, Massachusetts. Over the years, more than 6,500 students have owned their own College Pro franchises and more than 35,000 students have painted for the company.



### Customer Profile

College Pro is North America's largest exterior residential painting company.

### Business Situation

College Pro wanted to automate its operations at both the head office and franchise level so that the entire organization would run as a cohesive entity.

### Solution

College Pro took advantage of Microsoft's Digital Dashboard technology, which centrally and seamlessly manages all of its front office applications and provides unique web-based user customization. Not only is College Pro reengineering its business processes and realizing improved efficiencies, but it is also saving money by putting all its resources online.

### Software and Services

Microsoft SQL Server 7.0  
Microsoft Windows® 2000  
Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.0  
Microsoft Visual Basic®  
Microsoft ActiveX  
Microsoft Active Server Pages  
Microsoft Excel  
Microsoft PowerPoint®  
Microsoft FrontPage®

### Scenario

Knowledge Management

College Pro is now owned by The Franchise Company, who also directly owns or controls other recognized franchise systems such as the aforementioned Action Window Cleaners, as well as Certa ProPainters Ltd., Nutrilawn International Inc., Stained Glass Overlay, Paul Davis Renovations and California Closet Company, Inc.

*“Our web site will give our franchisees everything they need to manage their business while providing exceptional reporting and control capabilities for us.”*

## **The Challenges**

When College Pro decided to amalgamate its 700-user North American database system into a single entity, the challenge became how to combine two very different cross-border sets of operating procedures into one smoothly operating whole.

As well, the company's business model also presented its own corporate challenges. Having a student workforce results in having to recruit, train and manage 600 franchisees every season. College Pro needed a more effective way to manage its franchises and help them generate as many completed sales as possible within its short, seasonal (May through September) business window.

Any new solution would have to be easy to use and comprehensive in design so that it would satisfy the requirements of everyone from its CEO to general managers to franchisees. As well, the customer service representatives – overloaded with incoming calls from the franchisees phoning in for job leads – had specific database needs that had to be incorporated into any solution.

In order to address existing IT challenges, more effectively connect franchisees and support the College Pro's operating goals, the company chose to build a Digital Dashboard based on Microsoft technologies. This solution promised to enhance communication and provide for increased collaboration, while meeting the business objectives of a continental franchise operation.

## **The Solution**

College Pro quickly determined it would benefit most from a customized solution that leveraged the Internet as the majority of its franchisees have access PCs with Web connections.

Designed specifically with both franchisees and College Pro staff in mind, the Digital Dashboard solution (aptly named CPOWER for College Pro Online Web-based Enterprise Resource) provides fast, easy and seamless access to a wide range of mission-critical front-office information and applications. The solution was designed to help automate and simplify complex business applications for the company's employees and franchisees while providing the company with the tools to manage knowledge and optimize productivity levels, company-wide.

Using a state-of-the-art Digital Dashboard based on Microsoft Office 2000, Windows 2000 with Internet Information Server and Microsoft SQL Server 7.0, CPOWER equips each user with a single interface to a customized “start page” that provides access to sales leads, performance results and applications they need to perform their specific jobs. Regardless of whether users are in their office or offsite, all they need is access to Microsoft Internet Explorer web browser to get up to date. The Digital Dashboard enables both College Pro employees and franchisees to benefit from the rich analysis tools, shared user capabilities and Internet standards integrated into Office 2000.

April Broome  
National Controller  
College Pro Painters Ltd.

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College Pro's new solution enables users to access and use only the data that pertains to the task at hand. Under the new solution, there is no need to purchase, install or learn e-mail, database, reporting or other software packages. The learning curve is flat and everything is relevant and conveniently embedded onto the page to help increase individual, team and corporate productivity levels. Users simply enter their data and let CPOWER handle the rest from within the web browser.

### **The Inside Story**

According to Peter Carson, president of PCC Limited, a Microsoft Certified Solutions Provider and the developer of CPOWER, Microsoft's Digital Dashboard technology was a natural fit for a company like College Pro.

Having done work for College Pro in the past, Carson and his team of consultants had a fairly good understanding of College Pro's manually-managed business. The Web and Windows-based business solutions provider also had the knowledge base and skills necessary to custom-design an enterprise system with technology like the Digital Dashboard that could make the business more competitive.

"The solution gives a real pulse on your business, whether you're the president of College Pro and you want to see a snapshot of the performance of the entire organization or you're a franchisee and you want to see how your franchise is doing. It's a view of your own world – all rolled up and customized per user," said Carson.

CPOWER first went live in December 1999 to provide on-line, interactive training to franchisees over the Christmas holidays. Provided with online homework packages, the student franchisees were required to pass a virtual examination after reviewing training manuals and videos on CPOWER. The solution was also integrated into College Pro's divisional training sessions in the new year.

Full-time College Pro staff, including senior executives, were also trained on CPOWER during a hands-on, two-day training course led by PCC. The course was followed by weekly conference calls updating staff on new solution developments over the ensuing three months.

### **The Benefits**

The first CPOWER release was intended first and foremost as a productivity tool for the franchisees – who, after just a few short weeks, already relied on it to keep track of their sales leads and to communicate with management. As College Pro's national controller April Broome says, "The franchisees are not calling in as much to the call centres for leads and messages. They're flying on CPOWER. It's great."

Broome says she is confident that in terms of return on investment, CPOWER will save the company money. Thanks to the new solution, College Pro will no longer have to incur the costs of printing and distributing hardcopy training manuals and administrative material to its 600 franchises each year.

Beyond hard cost savings, College Pro expects the solution to payoff by helping managers and franchisees more effectively manage their time and resources. The company sees it as a great



way to help the franchisees' run their businesses easily and effectively – and enable them to focus most of their energies on painting houses.

The level of communication between management and the franchises is also better than ever thanks to CPOWER. College Pro is now able to monitor lead generation and follow the leads right through to the end of the job. The company doesn't have to wait for a report to be faxed in – CPOWER does it all automatically and instantaneously.

In addition, franchisees now set sales goals for themselves on their start page. As a lead becomes a sale, CPOWER automatically updates the franchisee's and College Pro management's Digital Dashboards in real time, thereby allowing College Pro to accurately monitor productivity.

### **The Next Steps**

PCC is already working on the next phase of CPOWER – incorporating back-end office applications, including internal accounting, income statements and an online store marketing official College Pro merchandise and painting products to franchisees.

College Pro is also delighted with PCC's service and long-term commitment to the solution. "It's important to choose a supplier with good integrity and a good reputation who will tackle all challenges," says Broome. "We consider PCC to be our partner. We talk three times a week, " she says. "Because CPOWER is an evolving, dynamic program, and we are confident that it will continue to redefine the way we do business."

### **The Bottom Line**

There's no question that CPOWER is improving the way College Pro works. With each passing day, the custom web-based solution is proving it is more flexible and functional than more traditional software applications. "It's where the industry is going," says Carson. "Organizations are going to leverage custom Internet-based solutions because they make perfect business sense. They are specifically built around core business requirements, they're scalable and highly cost-effective. You can't ask for a better final product."

College Pro couldn't agree more. In addition to delivering enhanced efficiencies, CPOWER is also helping the organization update its image. Current and perspective franchisees regard it as a hip new web site that makes running a business easy.

According to Broome, "CPOWER is going to enable us to take our business to higher ground. Thanks to Microsoft technologies, the solution is user-friendly and dynamic. And it's totally totally customized for our organization. It's exactly what we needed."

### ***For More Information***

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