



CLIENT SPOTLIGHT

Baking in transformation: Flour milling and ingredient 'start-up' puts business first to develop fresh technology landscape

As a leading flour milling and ingredient company, Ardent Mills delivers the industry's broadest portfolio. Its products are consumed daily by about 100 million people. Its 40-plus mills, mix facilities, and specialty bakeries operate in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico, producing a variety of offerings to a "who's who" of food companies across North America.

Despite its prominent status, Ardent Mills is a young company—conceived in 2013 as a collaborative venture between veteran food producers. From its first day of business in May 2014, Ardent Mills had a large client

footprint, top-of-the-line facilities, and a highly skilled 2,400-person workforce. It also faced many of the traditional start-up challenges—but on a massive scale, challenges that had to be addressed quickly.

Mixing businesses

While bringing together operations from multiple companies allowed the new Ardent Mills to leverage a combined nearly 300 years of experience, it also gave the mega-startup a tangle of disparate systems and manual processes for ordering goods and services and for delivering final products to customers.

After a thorough review and analysis, Ardent Mills determined that keeping and supporting existing sets of systems—or even trying to merge them into a legacy "survivor" system—was a path that didn't make sense beyond a two-year horizon. Simply reworking existing systems could create additional unforeseen layers of technical and licensing challenges, slowing down an otherwise nimble new business instead of speeding it up. What the company needed was a 'net-new' environment implemented with an agile approach to procuring and deploying the technology that would serve as the heart of its business.

+ THE IMPACT FROM TRANSFORMATION

In undertaking a transformation at start-up, Ardent Mills has created a net-new technology environment that's already making an impact.

SIMPLICITY AND SPEED

In some cases, 75 percent of the tasks have been sliced out of processes, eliminating redundancies and accelerating activities throughout the organization.

ACCURACY

The elimination of two sets of legacy systems and processes has helped diminish the potential for error, as employees now work with a single integrated cloud-based system.

SMARTS

The technology transformation forced Ardent Mills to dig deep to understand its activities and process—to see exactly how they could contribute to the future success of the new business.

Finding the right recipe

To begin putting a net-new environment in place, Ardent Mills enlisted the aid of Deloitte to select suppliers, negotiate agreements, perform vendor management and provide for operational continuity across a number of third-party IT software, services, and infrastructure areas. Deloitte's involvement was especially critical when it came to jump-starting IT procurement—saving Ardent Mills months of research on system and software choices, functionality, and vendor pricing. Deloitte's Supply Chain Managed Services practice worked alongside Ardent Mills to define a sourcing approach across IT, technology, procurement, legal, and business functions—scaling up quickly and integrating into the Ardent Mills' culture to form a single, high-performing team.

The final technology solution that made sense for Ardent Mills was one in which a core ERP system or backbone could be augmented in phases, using a "Velcro" approach to add modules of functionality as needed—and to remove and replace them just as easily when needed.

"We also needed a system that we could tailor to really bring a competitive advantage to Ardent Mills—one that we could align with our goals to exceed our

"We wanted to select an ERP that would align with the needs and size of our business."

VALERIE CONARD

Sr. Director of procurement for Ardent Mills

customers' expectations," said Valerie Conard, senior director of procurement. "Selecting IT partners to help deliver on that in a very short period of time was the biggest challenge."

Serving up a solution

A "business first" approach to the transformation has resulted in a company that's much smarter about what it does and how it does it, according to Ardent Mills CIO Jeff Schreiner. As part of the technology overhaul, the company had to determine every activity involved in a specific business process. In some cases, Ardent Mills was able to eliminate as many as 75 percent of the steps in a process—resulting in significant time savings and improved process accuracy, according to Schreiner. Throughout the process, Schreiner emphasized

an Agile methodology approach to execution—with the successful, rapid phased deployment a testament to that approach.

The first phase of Ardent Mills' transformation went live in May 2015 with the deployment of ERP components for finance, risk, and grain trading. The second phase has focused on adding sales and supply-chain management into the mix—followed by planned phases for extended plant operations, quality control, and various support functions. The company has more than 30 pre-selected "Velcro" applications that it can add to the backbone system as it continues to roll out phases and respond to future business challenges. "The Ardent Mills team delivered an innovative 'Velcro' cloud solution in an aggressive timeframe by creating a collaborative and agile environment," said Andrew Feinberg, principal, Deloitte Consulting LLP.

Following the initial Phase I implementation work by Ardent Mills, Deloitte returned to help accelerate the next series of implementation efforts and to support the tight collaboration between Ardent Mills and its strategic technology suppliers. "Deloitte helped us find true partners and adaptive relationships," Schreiner said. "You can buy canned solutions, but we needed ones that could scale to our needs."

+ SEEING RESULTS

The technology transformation of Ardent Mills is putting the company on a path to results that align with leadership's vision to be "the trusted partner in nurturing its customers, consumers, and communities through innovative and nutritious grain-based solutions."

RESPONSIVE

The new technology should allow Ardent Mills to meet its customers' needs faster—helping to deliver superior service while building confidence in the company.

FUTURE-ORIENTED

With technology streamlined, IT and business leaders within the company are freed up to focus more on innovating—on delivering products and services that deliver new value internally and externally.

AGILE

The new backbone-plus-Velcro approach allows Ardent Mills to adjust rapidly to market or competitive forces by simply adding or replacing applications that fit the company's evolving needs.

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