

Travel Leaders Group

Travel Leaders Group, a \$20 billion travel company, was formed in 2008 with a seemingly simple travel promise, “Your experience begins with ours.” The company takes that promise seriously in its day-to-day work with existing clients and ensures that with each acquisition or expansion, that promise is honored. Even before 2008, in its roots as Travel Acquisitions Group (TAG) coming together with Tzell Travel Group, these companies have had growth through excellence as part of their DNA. Since their official branding as Travel Leaders Group, that organic growth has continued with the acquisition of three major travel companies, including Nexion, Vacation.com and Protravel International, as well as a significant number of new franchisees and member travel agencies.

To support the continuous acquisitions, and the reorganizations that occur as a result, Travel Leaders Group has made Sabre® CentralCommand powered by Unit4 Business World (formerly Agress) the enabler of those decisions. “Bringing together the travel database with a live interface to the general ledger saves time, reduces headcount and allows us to see, at any given moment, the complete picture of Airlines Reporting Corporation sales and agency revenue. The new multi-client feature allows us greater flexibility to operate a multi-divisional agency with different business models and to rapidly integrate acquisitions,” says Willie Lynch, CFO. Travel Leaders Group’s internal Unit4 Business World team is responsible for onboarding new agencies – big and small – and has a model of self-reliance and internal project management.

As with any system migration, the addition of Travel Leaders Franchise Group and Cruise Holiday divisions onto Unit4 Business World brought its own host of requirements and unexpected surprises. The addition of these divisions was particularly exciting for the team; however, one of their requirements was an end-to-end Direct Debit solution, capable of managing hundreds of transactions per month, something that Unit4 Business World did not yet have in place.





Tim and Kelly with Shelley Zapp after winning a UNIT4 Innovation Award

There are inherent risks to any acquisition, both with the internal staff and with the customers of the new line of business. While there may be a goal of centralization, it's key to minimize the negative impacts of those changes, and allow the customers to experience "business as usual" in the short term with positive changes thereafter.

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When Travel Leaders Group on-boarded the Franchisee line of business, both the end customers, and the franchisees themselves became customers. The franchisees thus needed to experience that same level of commitment as any other client. And, that travel promise needed to be felt throughout an even greater organization, regardless of any internal system changes that needed to take place for operational reasons.

End-to-end Accounts Receivable Solution

The end solution needed to have complete end-to-end Accounts Receivable functionality starting with the proposal process and ending with the updating of the General Ledger with the Direct Debit payments. It also had to include the creation of a Direct Debit Upload file for submission to the bank for processing. It was never going to be a simple project. “As an example, there’s one Direct Debit that we do each month that results in 400 invoices,” – Kelly Gontarek, Sr. Financial Systems Analyst. It was the Travel Leaders Group team that needed to take them from Navision Direct Debit process to Unit4 Business World in only 3 weeks’ time.

With time ticking down on their 3 week clock, the team began the research project. Finding that there wasn’t an “off the shelf” solution available, they saw an opportunity to build the functionality in Unit4 Business World themselves.

Independent Development

Although running low on time, and high on pressure, they were accustomed to managing these projects internally and so had no intention (or budget!) of having Unit4 build this solution for them. After basic consultation

with the Unit4 team about similar functionality, they took ownership of the project, with Unit4 in the wings, merely as an advisor. As it turns out, Travel Leaders Group building it was the best possible solution as they are truly the experts and owners of their own system.

If they hadn't fully owned this requirement, they would have needed multiple software solutions in place across these divisions to manage this business critical requirement. The costs of running these solutions would have had a significant financial impact of hundreds of thousands of dollars per month. In addition, maintaining the positive relationship with customers, and keeping the promise they made to those customers when they first joined Travel Leaders Group was imperative.

No Margin for Error

The pressure came not only from the timeline, but from the criticality of the project. "When it comes to dealing with people's bank accounts, you get one chance. If you mess that up it doesn't matter how many times you do it correctly afterwards, you'll always be remembered for your mistake," – Tim Carlson, Manager Financial Systems.

Internally, the spotlight was on Tim and Kelly. The majority of their Travel Leaders Franchisees are on a Direct Debit plan, so these recurring monthly fees represent a large percentage of revenue that no one could afford to see go awry. And, while they aren't usually on the front lines, with the company promise to their customers, they were now on the hook to ensure Travel Leaders Group kept delivering to all these customers.

To really make this a success, the solution had to be more than just "usable" – it had to be easy to navigate and understand, so that business users could adopt it in a lightning-quick timeframe. The solution couldn't be viewed as time consuming or highly manual. What they built was simple, only six steps, and can now be completed in hours instead of days. It is scalable and transferrable, so it doesn't need to be locked into one Division or one team and it can be easily rolled out to new acquisitions.

The inherent flexibility of Unit4 Business World allowed them to build it at the business-user level. This post-implementation agility allows dynamic companies like

Travel Leaders Group to quickly and cost-effectively make unlimited changes to their business operations after Unit4 Business World is installed.

Travel Leaders Group – AR Direct Debit Process

1. Debit Proposal is created

AR staff generates customer payment proposal.

2. Debit Batch Maintenance

AR staff perform proposal updates as needed.

3. Debit Batch Approval

Supervisor or Divisional Controller approves payment proposal.

4. Direct Debit is Generated

Travel Leaders Franchise build direct debit file. Travel Leaders Cruise Holidays build direct debit file.

5. Payment is Confirmed

AR staff modifies payment and updates GL.

6. Direct Debit Agreements

AR staff creates or amends direct debit agreements.





Business Benefits

The benefits of implementing a direct-debit solution for their new lines of business cut across many levels. The project itself was a huge success; the first run went off without a glitch, both on-time and on-budget. Further, it worked to ensure the comfort of the new Divisions as well as all of the clients.

Reorganizations and acquisitions have the inherent risk of losing customers. With this financial transition being a “non-event,” Travel Leaders Group instilled confidence in their new client base and helped ensure retention.

Crossing hurdles like this was a portal to the future. It renewed the confidence of the leadership team that Unit4 Business World was flexible enough to support these unexpected business changes, and that their team had the skills and knowledge to implement them in a time-efficient and cost-effective manner. Travel Leaders Group leadership was encouraged to continue on their strategy of aggressive growth while delivering superior service to their customers.

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Finding showstoppers in a project is always difficult, but with the inherent agility and ease of configuration in Business World, teams like Tim and Kelly’s can take them in stride and move on to the next exciting thing Travel Leaders Group has planned.

When asked how they celebrated, the response was simple, “We moved on to another project the next day!” said Mr. Carlson.

About Unit4

Unit4 is a leading provider of enterprise applications empowering people in service organizations. With annual revenue over \$550M and more than 4,000 employees world-wide, Unit4 delivers ERP, industry-focused and best-in-class applications. Thousands of organizations from sectors including professional services, education, public services, not-for-profit, real estate, wholesale and financial services benefit from Unit4 solutions. Unit4 is in business for people.

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