

CUSTOMER CASE STUDY:

HABITAT FIRST GROUP

OPERATING TWO EXCLUSIVE HOLIDAY RESORTS IN THE COTSWOLDS (LOWER MILL ESTATE) AND DORSET (SILVERLAKE), HABITAT FIRST GROUP SAW A BIG INCREASE IN PLOT SALES DURING 2020, DESPITE THE COVID PANDEMIC.

The resorts' mix of high-end lakeside properties include beautiful cottages, stylish apartments, and spectacular villas, and such a unique business called for a unique software solution. Director, Red Paxton tells us more:

"Historically all of the Habitat First Group businesses have been quite separate. People bought a plot of land to build a house and we built some facilities, but that aside, we had a very hands-off approach. However, increasingly we found that owners were coming to us for help with renting their properties and arranging for them to be cleaned. As such our rental, cleaning and maintenance arms were borne from customer demand."

"We're kind of on our own in terms of the quality and building with nature ethos, architecture and community," adds Red. "There's nowhere else in the UK – in the world actually – where you've got an eclectic mix of architecture all designed by some of the best British architects. One of the reasons we're selling so many of these plots right now is that people want to be closer to nature and have space, security and a safe base to escape to with their families. That's been the big shift during these lockdowns."





STREAMLINING DISPARATE SYSTEMS INTO ONE PLATFORM...

With 2020 reservation levels for the unique plots surpassing previous years' and the company constantly growing, Red knew there was a real need to update the Habitat First Group software systems to support growth and futureproof each of the businesses. Ironically, they were almost at the point of pressing the button with another provider when a new manager joined the business and made Red aware of the impact Elite Dynamics were having in the industry. Before long, the task of streamlining disparate systems into one platform with zero degree of separation fell to the Elite Dynamics team.

"It soon became clear that Elite Dynamics were the best out there for software solutions as they're continually improving things," said Red. "They've created bespoke management solutions for us and the fact that they've even been able to find a solution is part of the reason we chose them. It's that flexible approach where a lot of others would have shirked away and told us that it didn't fit, or it couldn't be done. With something as important as this, it's imperative we get it right. We're confident in the quality of the systems and over a period of time it will pay back for us, because the system will be better, and the business will be more efficient."

The unique model of Habitat's resorts means it's always crucial for the company to look longer term. Silverlake in Dorset could effectively keep growing for anything up to the next 40 years to meet customer demand.



"We needed a system that would help us grow and also be with us for 20 years, maybe longer, who knows," added Red. "We only want to do it once. If Elite Dynamics are still around, continue to improve the systems and be open about what their future plans are, then it will be a great relationship going forward."

Crucially, technology can also support Habitat First Group in meeting their future ecological aims and objectives. A forward-thinking company in more ways than one, they have firmly thrown out their stall to be completely carbon neutral within the next 10 years.

"As a company, we've committed to being carbon neutral by 2030 so it's a big thing for us to try to reduce our carbon footprint wherever we can" said Red. "With the solutions the Elite Dynamics team have provided us, we're improving processes between teams so everything is on a centralised system. Staff across multiple sites and departments can access it on any device, immediately reducing reliance on paperwork. We didn't want to reach the stage where people had more paperwork than they could cope with. We even see it as a stress-reliever and morale booster for staff as now all the systems are syncing together, everything is streamlined making their working lives easier and more enjoyable. I'm sure we've wasted many man hours by not having efficient systems – lots of paper, lots of replications – and everything takes so much longer. Getting on top of the technology drastically cuts our paper use."

A SOLUTION FOCUSED ON ENHANCING THEIR CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE...

The needs of every individual customer is of the utmost importance to the Elite Dynamics team, so they really got under the skin of the Habitat First Group business model. Buoyed by their aspirations to 'do more better' and their ongoing focus on the customer journey, new features and modules were able to be added – some of which were driven by Habitat's requests and customer expectations. Every top business knows that the customer journey

doesn't end with a sale, once they sign up to buy a plot, that's just the start of the journey. Elite Dynamics' technical capability supports the whole process.

"We're in an era now where people expect to be able to access things online and if anything, Covid has intensified that" continued Red. "We don't print brochures anymore and we're able to make much more available on apps for our customers, including welcome notes, folders and maps. Technology can also help make people aware of the energy they're using in their properties – like how much heat they're using when doors and windows are open, to maximise the efficiency of the property or being able to turn on some form of heating an hour before they arrive instead of a day before. It's the responsible thing to do."

"We can also now create priority lists to make sure our cleaning and maintenance teams know if one particular property needs addressed before others. Previously when it was all paper based, we could have situations where some properties didn't have anyone visiting for a week but were getting done before the ones that had people arriving the same day. When paper is involved, there can inevitably be confusion and things can be missed, but using the new technology helps us make sure everything is the same five-star standard for people, whenever they visit."

SO WHAT'S NEXT FOR HABITAT FIRST GROUP?



With this year expected to bring more people appreciating the beauty of the UK and enjoying more staycations, Habitat First Group's ethos of back to nature, barefoot living, embracing the wild life, running up hills, mountain biking, kayaking, and just generally enjoying being outside, could be a winning formula. So, what's next for them in this exciting new world of technology? Red continues:

"We've successfully implemented a brand new system across the business when we've been the busiest we've ever been, which in itself is an achievement. To get it done through Covid and the world we currently find ourselves in is a great result. Whilst that has been the main project, we'll keep adding to the software and making it better. There are bolt-ons to come and 'Activity' booking platforms are in development, so we're really excited to see where technology can take us in the future. We like to move forward and part of that is ensuring our systems are the best they can be for staff and customers. With our new website and having the EliteParks solution up and running, I genuinely think we'll see an increase of 15-20 per cent in direct bookings, purely from an enhanced user and customer journey."

This will surely be music to the ears of MD, Jamaine Campbell and the Elite Dynamics team!

To find out more about Habitat First Group and their supporting businesses, visit:

habitatfirstgroup.com

lowermillestate.com

silverlakedorset.com