

CUSTOMER CASE STUDY:

PARK HOLIDAYS UK

Park Holidays IT Director, Michael Procyshyn, talked to us about how early investment in technology has helped to facilitate such growth, and how the company has had its fair experience of park management systems.

“Just before I joined the company back in 2015, we moved from In-Site software to ParkVision (Prodware UK). We had some real problems with lack of controls, lack of processes and no formal helpdesk for the IT function. The team would reboot bits of equipment, which then succeeded in kicking everyone off the internet. It was a real challenge. Then within a couple of months of joining, we all undertook a major move to new offices at Glovers House and that’s where I remember Jamaine coming to pitch Elite Dynamics to us.



“If we’re honest, we probably bought into a combination of both Jamaine and the product. It also helped that we were going down the single application route and had decided to go live with Microsoft Dynamics. Elite Dynamics was a brand new company so it was a bit of a concern, but with Jamaine’s history and holiday park industry experience, it was worth the gamble. If you look at the industry, there’s no-one doing what Elite Dynamics is doing. Other software providers do some bookings and online options, but they don’t do the full accounting side the way EliteParks does. Yes, you could go to one of the big global tech companies, but then you’ve got to start from scratch to write an entire caravan vertical within it.

“We’ve been an Elite customer and active user of EliteParks since 2017, and we deliver EliteParks via the browser within Citrix. The single application has simplified everything, it’s scalable, easy to fault find and it’s just a much better proposition. We were in a place where we had inadequate communications on the parks, so we embarked on updating everything and it probably took us over two years to get fibre optic to every park. This paid off as it gave us the bandwidth to deliver systems and internet to the parks. Now, everything is stable, reliable and robust. Performance is good, everything delivers, and when I tour the parks, everyone’s happy with the system.”

The continuous growth of the business and acquiring more parks to add to the portfolio means onboarding them to EliteParks – a process that can bring its own challenges, as it

needs to be as quick and smooth as possible whilst the parks continue to operate. When PHUK acquired Bridge Leisure in spring 2021, there were nine new parks to migrate to EliteParks.

Michael continued: “I tend to get involved in a lot of the data uploads due to the criticality and timings of getting parks on board. We’re mapping data from a system that has different fields, different grades, different plot numbering, different pricing. We’ve had experience of quite a few other software systems and quite frankly, some are horrible. Some just lump everything – customers, contacts, holiday guests, booking extras – into one contact field and you have to unpick it to work out where everything goes. The good thing is there’s a function within EliteParks (Microsoft Business Central) that makes it easy to pull everything into a spreadsheet. It’s that inbuilt configuration package within EliteParks that opens up the importing of data from other systems. The configuration packages really help and we use them a lot with acquisitions. In theory, that functionality makes it easy to onboard parks from a competitor system. The import routines work perfectly, you’ve just got to massage the original data in the correct format to map it across into the right fields.”

For someone to be given the office nickname ‘Mr Microsoft’, the fact that EliteParks is the only holiday park management solution to be built on the latest Microsoft Dynamics technology and hosted on Microsoft Azure servers, was also a big selling point for PHUK. Michael had also worked on Navision – the original Microsoft Dynamics ERP – before joining PHUK.

“We’re Microsoft through and through,” said Michael. “We’re really a one-stop shop. Because Microsoft is very embedded on the browser-based technology, a lot of the heavy lift server grunt is performed within a single database. Microsoft has improved capacity



and performance within the SQL database and those recent performance improvements have been adopted within EliteParks. I was surprised and impressed with the scalability of EliteParks.”

“What I really like is the standardisation of EliteParks and the way it embeds with all of the other Microsoft toolsets and the Office integration. Everyone is on Word, Excel, PowerPoint etc, so it makes perfect sense to have an ERP from Microsoft with a look and feel that everyone is already comfortable with. We’ve found the simpler you can keep it, the better and simpler it is for us to operate those systems. Just using one system throughout is why we can onboard parks so quickly. That works really well for us.”

PHUK is a company that is always moving forward, whether that’s acquiring new parks, adding new services, or taking the lead on technology.

Michael continued: “At one point we were working regularly with Jamaine on a lot of modifications to the software, but EliteParks has put so much investment into expanding the functionality – adding modules for things like housekeeping, maintenance, and arcades – that we’re now on the standard product. The next drive and the reason behind us wanting to be on the newest version of the software, is to go down the Power Apps route and start utilising Power Apps to simplify jobs around the park.



“One of the thorns in our sides is meter reads,” adds Michael. “You go out on park, go to the plot number and type everything in. With the Power App, you simply barcode the meter, tie that meter to the plot pitch then all you have to do from then on is scan the barcode to get the meter reading. The Power App does everything in the background. It pulls back the last meter reading and when you scan the meter, OCR (Optical Character Recognition)

technology converts the numbers to pre-fill the reading for you to accept. Again, in the background the Power App would be working to create all the transactions of a current meter read. In a similar vein, some of the coin machines in our arcades can have up to four coin meters within them. Currently you have people going into the arcades with a spreadsheet to write down what they think is the meter reading, then input it into EliteParks. But what if they've misread or mis-typed it, or added an extra zero on the end? If you're running a Power App, you simply scan the barcode. Meter readings are one of those mundane tasks that Power Apps can transform.

“The tech we've previously invested in should enable us to use Power Apps out on our parks a lot better too. The classic is your Maintenance Team. Some parks use the maintenance module on EliteParks, some don't. But if you've got a Power App, the team member clicks on the App to check the job list, hits complete after each one and the Power App finishes the maintenance jobs in the background. There's always a record of who's done what and how long it has taken, then it's onto the next job. It just brings a whole new world of added functionality and simplification.”



Such is the desire of PHUK to drive forward, not only their own business, but the entire holiday park industry, by adopting new technology, Michael has helped to kick-start a new Elite Dynamics User Group. Run completely independently by Elite customers, the User Group aims to share and leverage knowledge and experience from other users about Elite Dynamics solutions and to influence the Elite Dynamics product roadmap. The inaugural meeting was held in October 2021.

“What I wanted to get out of the User Group was a collective voice to help to drive modifications, changes and functionalities, through EliteParks,” said Michael. “At the end of the day, we all operate in the same way. We've all got the same pain points. We've all got

maintenance people who don't like using computers or keeping records up to date. We've all got issues with 'losing' caravans. That might sound strange but if the maintenance team stick a caravan on a base, and don't keep a record, then things aren't where they should be when you try to audit. By my reckoning, if we can tell Jamaine and the Elite Dynamics team where we want the product to go, it benefits everyone.

"We've raced ahead and done lots of different things and we're happy to share those ideas and innovations with everyone else. It just makes sense. We know other parks are looking into access control systems. For example, if we can store the cardswipe system details in EliteParks and link the ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) and launcher cards, then an owner can update their car registration on their owner details. So, when they arrive on park and drive up to the barrier, it will open. You've got that level of integration. You would be able to see when people are coming and going and who is and isn't on park. Taking that one step further, if we put smart locks on our caravans, we can drive access control through smartphones or NFC readers, so it alleviates the issue of people losing keys. The User Group is an example of us all working together and the theory is, we would get to vote on future modifications to include in the Elite Dynamics product roadmap.

"There can be a misconception within the business that we can gain an advantage on our competitors by doing slicker things with our systems. That's not really true as we all do bookings in the same way, and we all do holidays in the same way. The differentiator is how you operate the system. If you use it to its maximum potential and you use it to gain better operating procedures, then you can get a lead on your competitors. It's using the Power Apps and EliteAnalytics – Power BI. Wherever I am, I can get up to the minute management information on my phone, iPad, laptop and that's vital for us. Margins, seasonability, occupancy, there's so much valuable data at our fingertips.

"We like to work efficiently, and EliteParks gives us that efficiency. We can see the efficiencies EliteParks gives us at present and we can see the opportunities it will give moving forward, because of the integration with Microsoft. For us, that's the driver and that's why we stay on the Microsoft route and with Elite Dynamics. We support each other, have a great working relationship and there's always more we can do together."