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Produce Pro Software Upgrade Case Study: Four Seasons Produce Inc.

“If you have the best ideas and the framework to integrate best practices into your system’s code, you will constantly grow and improve your business operations. Produce Pro’s upgrades allow those ideas to get shared and spread the knowledge.” Nelson Longenecker, VP Business Innovation, Four Seasons Produce.

Importance of a Produce Pro Software Upgrade

Produce Pro supports over 120 produce companies and with customers serving varying industries, they are constantly learning and updating their system to provide the best features, functionality, and practices for each customer.

A Produce Pro software upgrade provides multiple benefits for their customers like:

- ◆ Access to the new features and enhancements that have been built into the system since the customer’s last upgrade (or your implementation).
- ◆ The upgrade also refreshes the customer’s warranty.
- ◆ Having fresh code also makes it easier for Produce Pro to provide fast, top-notch support. The more recent the customer’s code base, the more efficiently Produce Pro can research any quirks and retrofit new features

In terms of specific enhancements to the system, every company is different, so any one of Produce Pro’s customers is likely to enjoy a range of benefits from upgraded software.

How Produce Pro Handles Upgrades

Produce Pro approaches version tracking a little differently than most software companies do. Other companies release new versions of their software on a predetermined schedule – for example, once or twice a year. To get new features, then, the clients have to wait for the next release. However, Produce Pro’s commitment to the produce industry has given them a different point of view. If a special enhancement or feature will help the Produce Pro client provide better, faster service for their customers, why should they have to wait?

If a custom feature would benefit multiple companies in our user base, we roll it into the main code base as soon as it’s complete. Produce Pro considers this one of their greatest strengths: each of their clients gets individual attention, and what they learn from each company benefits the rest.

Successful Software Upgrade Story

An upgrade can be seen by many companies as a large undertaking. However, Produce Pro understands the time and planning it takes companies to do an upgrade and partners with them to make the software upgrade as smooth as possible. Through the upgrade Produce Pro becomes more of a partner working through the difficult decisions and offering helpful insights into best way to implement the upgrade. Four Seasons Produce Inc. upgrade is a great example of how a successful partnership can result in a smooth software upgrade. Four Seasons decided to upgrade their system to stay current on all their platforms, and to enable effective support by Produce Pro.

Four Seasons' approach to the upgrade was to minimize the impact to their associates and to have **no** impact to their customers and suppliers. To accomplish this, basic project management principles were used during the course of the Four Seasons upgrade to ensure its success. With the initiation of the planning phase of the upgrade, Four Seasons and Produce Pro worked to define the team members to be involved in the weekly status meetings, and defined the communication plan. This ensured efficient communication among the relevant team members. In addition, escalation points were determined to help address any items requiring special attention.

The weekly status meetings were structured around clear and concise agendas developed between Four Seasons and Produce Pro, resulting in effective, organized, productive meetings. Action items identified during each status meeting were assigned owners (either individuals or teams) who were then responsible for the completion of the task. Pending and in progress action items were reviewed during each weekly meeting. In terms of the overall project plan, clear milestones were identified, and the day to day tasks focused on achieving those goals. As milestones approached, a risk analysis was conducted to ensure contingency plans were in place. The risk analysis was conducted well enough in advance, allowing the company to adjust schedules, windows for work, and expectations with minimal impact to either organization. Once key milestones were completed, the Four Seasons and Produce Pro teams met to debrief. Outstanding issues were discussed, and assigned owners.

Four Seasons selected a team of key associates from different areas who worked intensely with Produce Pro on a daily basis to be their upgrade team. These associates were introduced to the upgraded system before any other members; their responsibilities were to learn the new upgrade, which required them to test their daily routines end-to-end. During their testing of the upgrade they identified what changes were made and what new features were added. Once the associates were familiar with the upgrade they began to train their teams on the new utilities and changes, and supported them after the upgrade.

“Produce Pro was with us through the planning and execution stages. They had a project manager who was instrumental in the communication and implementation process. We worked as partners through this upgrade and it showed their dedication to customer service and making each customer a priority.” Heath Johnson, Director of IT, Four Seasons Produce

Keys to Success

To accommodate the upgrade team and guarantee their success, the Four Seasons IT Department provided a fully functioning development environment. This means they had two revisions of Produce Pro sitting side-by-side, the new upgrade and the current system. The side-by-side comparison allowed the upgrade team to learn how their daily tasks for each of their departments would work in the new system as well as how the new features would be introduced to their team.

When the week came to switch Four Season onto their upgraded Produce Pro system, Produce Pro sent a programmer on sight and had the support team at Produce Pro headquarters notified so if any issue arose they could be immediately addressed.

What made the upgrade so successful?

1. A well thought-out and executed plan
2. Four Seasons managers dedicated to a seamless upgrade and providing knowledgeable associates from their assigned areas to help prepare their teams.
3. A solid support structure both internally and externally.
4. The communication and partnership between Four Seasons and Produce Pro

“Having Produce Pro to run the core processes of our business has contributed significantly to the success of our business.” Nelson Longenecker, Four Seasons Produce VP Business Innovation.

Customer profile

- Four Seasons Produce Inc. located in Ephrata, PA is one of the largest independent produce wholesalers in the country, is rooted in a tradition of excellence that spans over three decades. Their reputation for high quality fruits and vegetables and supply chain solutions provide the foundation for their partners' continued success.
- Four Seasons Produce Inc. implemented Produce Pro Software in February of 1999.

For more information please contact Courtney Heim at 630-395-9600.