



CASE STUDY

Online 3Power Platform Expertise Puts Gutter - Vac Ahead of the Franchise Pack.

Company size: 80+

Industry: Cleaning

The Challenge

Aging software can create unnecessary administrative burden

Gutter-Vac is an Australian national franchise business that offers a range of residential maintenance solutions, including systems for the removal of debris from home guttering.

For much of its 27-year history, Gutter-Vac's small team used a combination of telephony, email, individual spreadsheets, and a specialised franchise software product to run its day-to-day operations.

With every team member running their own spreadsheets, administration effort was duplicated due to data needing to be rekeyed

into the software system. This process was prone to human error and forced reconciliation efforts through the business when errors were picked up.

The software interface was not intuitive and system performance was often slow. Making changes or improvements to the software attracted high costs and requested updates took a long time.

Inaccurate data made it difficult to provide timely responses to business inquiries. It also made it harder for Gutter-Vac to spot opportunities to improve royalty rates for existing territories and impacted the effective marketing of new franchises.

Completing mandatory weekly reporting tasks created excessive administrative burden for franchisees. Several business-critical modules in the Gutter-Vac software instance were pending deprecation, posing an immediate business continuity risk.

Faced with reduced team productivity, unhappy franchisees, and the loss of business-critical functionality in its core software system, Gutter-Vac's founders, Warren and Anne Ballantyne knew they needed to modernise their systems and processes for good.

Gutter-Vac needed a solution that could:

- Centralise business data from multiple sources
- Reduce the amount of time spent on data entry
- Offer lower total cost of ownership
- Provide ease of use for staff and franchisees
- Simplify the mandatory tasks and processes for staff and franchisees
- Improve the speed and accuracy of reporting
- Handle changes to compliance or regulatory requirements
- Adapt to meet changing business needs without exorbitant cost.

The Solution

Platform based solutions help businesses grow without constraint

A search for an IT services provider with franchise expertise led Gutter-Vac to Online 3; a technology solutions and services company with a proven track record of delivery to franchise operators.

"The main issue for Gutter-Vac was their incumbent system was a proprietary software product. It was developed to do a limited number of things and could not be easily or quickly adapted to meet a wider variety of use cases," explains Aedan Glasby, Director and Solution Architect at Online 3.



"This meant Gutter-Vac would always face constraints and high development costs trying to keep it aligned to the changing needs of their business."

Online 3 recommended Gutter-Vac retire the legacy software and replace it with a platform-based solution built on Microsoft Power Platform, Microsoft 365, and Dynamics 365. The low code capabilities of Microsoft Power Platform would be leveraged to modify the base solution, adding more functionality and features on an iterative basis.

This approach would allow Gutter-Vac to stagger its investment, instead of being saddled with prohibitive upfront costs. It would also ensure ample time to thoroughly develop, test and validate new system capabilities and corresponding processes.

While the prospect of such radical change was daunting at first, with a little help from members of their team to translate some of the concepts involved, Warren and Anne quickly saw the benefit of what Online 3 was proposing.

- ● The vision for the future that Online 3 presented was a business that could effectively run itself using technology.

– Warren Ballantyne, Founder & Managing Director, Gutter-Vac

Solution Summary

The Online 3 solution provided greatly enhanced functionality by drawing on modern cloud platform services. Consolidating the bulk of Gutter-Vac's systems into one platform delivered cost benefits and made more effective use of existing licenses.

- Multiple sources of company data integrated into a single platform using Microsoft 365
- New Microsoft 365 E3 licensing deployed to Gutter-Vac head office team members to enhance collaboration and data security
- Existing Office 365 E1 licenses procured for the Franchisees email redeployed to provide access to a SharePoint intranet
- Intranet housed a new royalty calculation and reporting engine developed for Gutter-Vac with a combination of SharePoint Online Lists, Power Automate and Power BI
- Microsoft Dynamics 365 Sales Enterprise combined with Power Automate and Power BI provided a Franchise Relationship Management system to automate processes between Gutter-Vac and franchisees
- Microsoft 365 features enabled to enhance Franchisor-to-Franchisee collaboration.

Crayon Channel supported Online 3 with streamlined licensing and provisioning of customer accounts via the PRISM partner portal. Crayon Channel also provides Online 3 with support services that assist Online 3 to extend helpdesk assistance to Gutter-Vac franchisees beyond standard business hours.



“Our goal was to ensure that whoever is in this business after us has something worth being in.” said Warren. “The vision for the future that Online 3 presented was a business that could effectively run itself using technology. We knew that is where our business and all businesses really must go.”

The Results

Modern Cloud Services Put Gutter-Vac On Track for Sustained Growth.

In just 12 weeks, Online 3 had implemented the base solution. This included proof of concept and validation of the new intranet and royalty calculation system with Gutter-Vac's Franchisee Advisory Committee.

Working with Gutter-Vac and its Franchisee Advisory Committee, Online 3 has continued to refine and improve the solution, automating more and more of Gutter-Vac's business processes with each passing year.

“It was immediately obvious that what we got was a quantum leap from what we had,” said Warren. “If you asked me to dot point all the things we have done since the new system was introduced, there wouldn't be enough time in the day.”

Amongst many notable improvements has been the ability of the Online 3 solution to tackle new quarterly compliance requirements introduced by the Federal Fair Work Ombudsman.

Gutter-Vac is legally obliged to ensure franchisees adhere to the new compliance standards and providing the required reports.

“This process was painful for franchisees as it had to be done over again any time an employee left or someone new started. We now have this automated to the point that they can pick and tick boxes and do it in five minutes.” said Warren.

The new system has also enabled Gutter-Vac to focus on adding value to franchisees, including a team member dedicated to franchisee wellbeing and mental health. This was of real value during the pandemic lock downs and extreme weather phenomenon across Australia in the two years.

“Our franchisees experienced an average 23% growth in demand over the past two years. That’s not a bad thing but the rate of change to their operating conditions caused a lot of stress.

Having someone place a call and see what we can do to support them makes a difference,” explains Warren. “Automation hasn’t meant we reduce our headcount. It means we can offer a whole new level of service and support to franchisees.”

Warren and Anne Ballantyne acknowledge there was no silver bullet that would immediately turn around 27 years of entrenched business process and behaviour.

“It has been a process and it has taken time. There is trial and error along the way, but it is always fixable.” said Anne. “If there is a glitch with a new roll out, it is usually straight forward for Aedan and the team to resolve, and the system allows us to set automated reminders and notifications in place to ensure there are no repeats.”

Anne, Warren, and Aedan agree the success of the Gutter-Vac transformation effort was driven by a commitment to continuous improvement, drawing on the frontline experience of the Gutter-Vac Franchisee Advisory Committee to test and validate improvements, and a deep, trusting relationship between all parties.

“You have to embrace technology; even though it sounds foreign, you need to have a go. Always have an expert on the side that knows what they’re doing,” advises Anne. “We have Online 3 because they’re experts in their field. Employing the best and working with the best will work out well now and in the future.”

- ● Crayon's channel team supported Online 3 with guidance on the best case for Microsoft licensing on the Gutter-Vac project. We are able to streamline licensing and provisioning via the PRISM partner portal and also work with Crayon to extend the helpdesk support services we provide to Gutter-Vac franchisees.

— Aedan Glasby, Director & Solutions Architect, Online 3



The Future

Online 3 Delivers Continuous Improvement with Power Platform

Today, Online 3 is working with Gutter-Vac to automate updates to the royalty calculation engine to allow for changes to CPI and royalty tiering amongst the franchisees. They are also developing and rolling out new processes to automate franchisee agreement renewal processes and further streamline the agreement lifecycle management for Gutter-Vac.

“The strength of any partnership is to ask yourself could you be without it,” said Warren. “We can’t conceive of not having Aedan and Online 3 as part of our business.”

Gutter-Vac is taking advantage of a much-reduced workload to extend its franchisee wellness program.

It has launched a monthly Teams meeting called The Vac-Cave, where franchisees can get together and share their experiences in support of one another.

Warren and Anne hope to build this program into the future by partnering with organisations like the Black Dog Institute.

“We have the liberty to do this now, because we are not bogged down with manual processes.” said Warren.

“Everything we do is driven by the needs of the franchisees. If we can put something in place that makes their lives easier, it makes the relationship so much better.”

- ● Always have an expert on the side that knows what they’re doing. We have Online 3 because they’re experts in their field. Employing the best and working with the best will work out well now and in the future.

— Anne Ballantyne, Founder & CFO, Gutter-Vac



Time-intensive compliance reports are now automated and completed in 5 minutes



Business competitiveness improved and business growth sustained at 23+%



Automation means more time spent on franchisee well-being programs



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