



Age of Agility

How a partner-first approach to HR transformation has enabled Synlait Milk to achieve organisational agility and mobility in challenging times.

Synlait

“To run our workforce plan, we were reliant on payroll for our single source of truth, an excel spreadsheet from finance that routinely either took three hours to update or just broke down and froze. Everything else was paper-based and highly manual.”

Andrew Dennan,
Synlait Milk



Strong economic development and increasing employee numbers can present unique challenges to a rapidly growing business. Synlait Milk Limited, an exciting New Zealand dairy processing and milk nutrition success story, turned to Pinpoint HRM to help in its global mission of 'doing milk differently for a healthier world'.

Synlait's exceptional 20% year on year growth for the past decade is driven by its pioneering and disruptive spirit, and a commitment to sustainable dairy practices and manufacturing innovation.

From its first dairy farm acquisition in 2000, the company has evolved to a global player. It operates state-of-the-art production plants across New Zealand and has more than 900 employees, a 50% increase in two years. Its facility in Dunsandel, which processes more than 700 million litres of milk annually also houses a purpose-built infant formula facility, the largest in the Southern Hemisphere.

In early 2018 the job of ensuring Synlait's people-related systems kept up with its phenomenal growth fell to Head of HR Shared Services, Andrew Dennan.

Andrew joined the milk nutrition company from the Middle East in 2017. He describes the experience as 'going from an actual desert to a data desert'.

He found Synlait rich on vision but short on HR frameworks to push forward with its vision to unlock further potential from its innovative manufacturing processes. It had minimal systems, no integration and limited access to credible HR data to inform workforce strategies or decision-making.

Along with a new strategic HR model, Andrew knew what was needed was a scalable solution to provide a central source of truth and timely data to enable his HR team to become true business advisors.


With a reputation for doing things differently and driving value added thinking, Andrew set out to lead Synlait's digital HR transformation.

'We needed a system that could provide us with quality information while also empowering our employees to help manage their development and career path. Our business operates in seven locations across four shifts 24/7 and most of any day, the majority of employees won't come in contact with HR. So it was vital we found a way to give our people the access and mobility to ensure we were delivering top line HR services.'

Now able to articulate the crucial need for a new HR model with accurate data to enable the company's ambitious strategic growth objectives, Andrew went to Synlait's Board armed from the outset.

“Sell the sizzle before they see the steak is one of my key learnings from this process,” he says. “We made sure our leaders didn't just want a new system – they fully understood the imperative business need for it. By having these conversations early and often, when the business case hit the ELT they said we were ‘pushing an open door!’”





“My team now has eyes all over the system and can access analytics at every click,” Andrew says. “We can see where our employees are having trouble completing processes then target this through specific training. We see this as our Kaizen approach to continuous improvement.”

With his executives now fully committed to the future vision, Andrew took a ‘partner first’ view to vendor selection.

‘We chose Pinpoint as our HR Tech advisory partner alongside our vendor Oracle,’ Andrew says. ‘Pinpoint added value instantly. They gave us advice on project readiness and how we could deliver the solution sooner.’

Andrew firmly believes ‘Partner first saves a lot of time, lot of money, takes the pressure off the customer and de-risks the project.’ He adds, ‘You’ve got to be open to listening to your partner’s advice. We’ve done one implementation; they have done many.’

Then keeping in mind CEO Leon Clement’s advice ‘to keep it simple’ Andrew and Pinpoint set to work. Together they developed a roadmap to fit the needs of the dynamic Synlait.

Working with Pinpoint, the process of implementation was accelerated from 12 months to 27 weeks. Pinpoint also helped Andrew understand resourcing requirements and stay true to Synlait’s budget, timeline and vision.

‘Knowing you’ll need different people on the bus at different times is critical,’ Andrew says. ‘Working with Pinpoint gave me the ability to flex the team throughout the project as needed. It also gave me the confidence that the right resources were allocated to get priority jobs done. Pinpoint ensured we met our critical deadlines, even accelerating timelines where we could.’

Andrew also engaged Pinpoint’s HRM’s Change Practice to develop an innovative strategy to help user adoption. This resulted in an in-application digital tool to allow the HR team to provide tailored training and access to adoption analytics.

On thing Andrew knew from the outset was he had to 'bring the change to Synlait's people'. Using creative flair, he created a branding strategy and awareness campaign around 'The Nook', a 24 hour space onsite where employees can access the new system.

Andrew and his team are now focused on implementing phase 2 of the HR transformation Learning and Absence Management – as well as the HR Helpdesk. Up next will be more 'toys' including Oracle HCM's AI recruitment technology.

'We've achieved so much more than we set out to in the beginning. We've created a data driven HR service delivery model that gives us instant access to data and the ability to act quickly with intelligence and insights.' Andrew says. 'Our Oracle HCM Cloud solution enables our people to operate anywhere, anytime – with zero drop in productivity even during recent challenging times.'

The system and the access to real-time data has enabled true organisational agility and for Synlait, this is the real gain in this project.

“ For Synlait, this whole journey has been about buying back time. Time for our HR teams to help further motivate and engage our people through a superior employee experience, and time for our employees to buy into Synlait's vision around their own productivity, performance and engagement. We couldn't have done it without Pinpoint. They set us on the right path from the outset and have kept us on track. Having the right partner is the key to success.’ ”

14,000

Hits on the system per month






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