

## Malta Vacation Ownership Specialist Poised for Rapid Growth with Acumatica

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– Marthese Vella, CIO, Azure Malta

### OVERVIEW

For more than 25 years, Azure has marketed and sold high-end vacation club memberships for the 5-Star Radisson BLU Resort & Spa, Malta Golden Sands on the beautiful Mediterranean island of Malta. After selling more than 5,500 memberships in two successful vacation clubs, company executives decided to expand into new properties and products providing members with more flexibility and choice. They knew, however, they couldn’t expand on the company’s dated technology infrastructure and patchwork of legacy financial systems. After significantly upgrading their physical hardware, the firm implemented Acumatica ERP for its flexibility, scalability and open system.

### SITUATION

For years, the 200 employees of Azure Malta adapted their sales business to the four legacy software applications they used to run the business. They used Sage 50, Omnis reservation system, and Microsoft Access and Excel—manually entering data into each system, importing and exporting data to other applications to keep everything current.

In 2013, amid increasing competition for consumers’ vacation spending, Azure adopted a digital media marketing strategy and embarked on a plan to build a strong digital presence, one that facilitated online sales and increased customer service. Doing so would give them a competitive edge in the fractional sales vacation market.

In addition, executives decided to build upon the success of its two vacation clubs, the Island Residence Club and The Heavenly Collection, and expand. They wanted to grow into new properties in different countries, add vacation options and expand into new areas and products, providing members with more flexibility and choice.

Azure first invested a substantial amount in its technology infrastructure, replacing legacy systems with modern technologies. Then executives hired Marthese Vella as Chief Information Officer to streamline its software applications and prepare for rapid growth. “We had been adapting our processes to the technology,” says Vella, “and our old systems really lacked functionality.”

Azure ran its financial operations on Sage 50, which was not connected to its reservation system or its contacts file. Manually moving data between systems was inefficient. Trying to create financial reports was resourceheavy and required manually importing and exporting from the four systems and took several days, she says.

### High Priority: Customization, Connect to Third-Party Applications

The company initially considered moving to Microsoft Dynamics NAV, SAP, Oracle or a newer version of Sage. High on Vella’s priority list was a system that could scale, one that was easy-to-use, flexible and open, meaning it could easily integrate with thirdparty solutions.

The offerings from SAP, Oracle and Microsoft were quickly dismissed due to their overly complicated enterprise requirements and difficulty to customize. “We are complex but didn’t need an expensive complicated system,” Vella says. “Some of the larger software programs are so big you struggle to fit them to you.”



### COMPANY

- **Location:** Malta
- **Industry:** Tourism – Vacation Ownership

### SOLUTION

- Acumatica Financial Management
- Acumatica Inter-Company
- Accounting
- Acumatica Fixed Assets

### KEY RESULTS

- Gained platform for industryleading rapid growth
- Added multi-currency integration
- Consistent access to data available through mobile devices
- Integrates easily with third-party solutions

## SOLUTION

### Easy-to-use, Flexible, Scalable Acumatica

Angelo Pickard of Computime Software introduced Vella to Acumatica, which he knew exceeded her list of priorities. Vella liked that Acumatica was a modern system built to easily connect to third-party applications and could scale easily as the company grew. In addition, Azure could choose between hosting the software itself on-premise or moving to the cloud, and was easy-to-use, she says.

"Third-party integration was a priority and you can tell Acumatica is a modern system built around the flexibility you need in today's world," Vella says. "I come from the legacy world where you dump every process in a system that doesn't talk to anything else. With modern systems, I have the option to integrate with our systems with ease—without the need for customization."

"Acumatica is exceptional at this," she continues, "and it's one of the things that tipped the balance to select it as our advanced financial system."

Implementing Acumatica was smooth, wellplanned out by Computime, and faced only minor delays when Azure struggled to export data from antiquated systems, she says. The company's financial year ends in December, and they were live with Acumatica in mid- January 2017.

Vella has high praise for the Computime team. "They were on-budget, on-track, and very professional; I really enjoyed working with them," she says. "They were very engaged, knew the Acumatica system well, and made us feel important and cared for." Many suppliers don't deliver that level of service, she says. "They were really focused on deliverables, meeting deadlines and making sure our data was what it needs to be," Vella added. "I was very happy that we chose them."

Vella also credits the success of this project to a great business team, spearheaded by Simone Cassar Parnis, Financial Controller at Azure. Says Vella, "Simone and her team were vital to the success of this project. She took ownership of this project from the selection process right through to the planning and implementation of Acumatica."

## BENEFITS

### Much More Efficient Staff

Acumatica has made Azure's team much more efficient, Vella says, adding they have recouped many hours previously spent moving data around to the various applications. "Rather than taking 2 days to export and import data into different systems, the team spends maybe 10 minutes to run reports," she says.

Azure's balance sheet is finally formulated the way the finance team wanted, and they are using sub accounts to the fullest, something they couldn't do in Sage 50. "We now have much better reporting and we aren't wasting time formulating spreadsheets," Vella says.

The accounting team can accomplish tasks that were difficult in Sage, including attaching documents to invoices and transactions, copying and pasting previous transactions and journal entries, and posting journal entries in different currencies directly through the GL. That last task is important as Malta's tourist base hails not only from nearby Italy, but from the UK and Scandinavian countries as well.

In addition, "The fact that you can post intercompany entries in Acumatica by simply changing the branch name at line transaction is just fantastic," Vella says. "This reduces human error because when we posted manually in Sage, there were many times we forgot to also post them in the corresponding company."

### Acumatica Reduces Need for Large IT Team

"I often joke about this project," Vella says. "I didn't have to sweat during or after it, and sometimes I even forget we have the system." Typically, she is reminded only when she needs to create a new user and assign new rights. "Everything is so easy to do in Acumatica," Vella says, "I have great peace of mind that when it comes to IT, I don't need a huge department to maintain the system or have the cost of a large IT staff to support it." Instead, she can scale quickly as needed without adding to her IT staff of five. "Acumatica is a perfect fit for that model."

Azure can also add users without driving up Acumatica's cost thanks to the company's affordable, unlimited user pricing model. The 200-person company plans to expand rapidly, a move that could have drastically increased costs with the other ERP providers. With Acumatica, "I have peace of mind that we know what the cost is going to be," Vella says. "We don't have a static business and our number of users might increase and then decrease."

### Azure plan: Leverage Technology to Extend Industry Leadership

Most importantly, Acumatica provides Azure a modern platform for rapid growth into new lines of business and new properties in other countries. Azure plans to become the European leader in the flexible vacation ownership business and is moving to a credit-based model where members buy credits and use them for not just hotel stays but to rent cars, boats and other resort stays. The business model is novel in Malta and Europe, Vella says. To track credits used to rent apartments, luxury boats and other properties, Azure needs a flexible financial system, one that can scale as quickly as they need it to.

"Acumatica's ease of use, flexibility, scalability and affordability makes it a perfect fit for companies like us," Vella says. "The software's flexibility allows us to customize it to the unique way we do business, and it integrates easily with third-party software. Acumatica has all the modern features we need to be competitive."