

Auto Action Group Shifts into Overdrive with Flexible Acumatica Cloud ERP



OVERVIEW

Jared Cohen planned to scale the company his father founded, Auto Action Group, into a national player when he first took over the business. But the automotive aftermarket distributor and installer ran on a legacy DOS-based system that Cohen knew couldn't handle increased transactions. Auto Action Group deployed Acumatica Cloud ERP, gaining a modern solution with accurate reporting, field service management, and streamlined CRM capabilities that will drive national growth.

KEY RESULTS

- Improved operations with robust reporting through dashboards, eliminating errors
- Acquired a flexible platform that provides functionality to facilitate the business' expanding needs
- Gained new business management information, providing the insights necessary to make faster, more-informed decisions
- Added field service management functionality, lowering operational costs
- Automated credit card expense uploads and data functions, saving time

CHALLENGES

Bruce Cohen founded Auto Action Group in 1978 to sell car dealers aftermarket automotive accessories. He expanded the business over the ensuing 27 years adding several related businesses such as car washes and limo services. The company installed accessories at car dealers or any one of Auto Action Group's installation centers.

In 2005, as son Jared Cohen graduated from college with plans to pursue a career in the restaurant business, tragedy struck the family when Bruce passed away unexpectedly from a heart attack. Cohen's mom, Brenda, asked Jared to consider running the automotive business, which he has done ever since.

"I didn't know much about cars at the time, but certainly learned quickly," Jared Cohen says. Among his smartest moves was asking Joe Cardinale, head of sales under Bruce, to be his partner. Cardinale now owns 50 percent of Auto Action Group and other related businesses with Jared. "I knew right away I had nothing without him," says Cohen.

As a student of business right out of college, Cohen examined the company's systems and learned they were archaic and needed to be replaced. In 2006, Auto Action Group upgraded to a Linux system called Millennium Power Base, a blue-screened Pick database system that managed sales, GL, and had a custom web app that allowed Cohen to view the status of installation work in progress.

"I had ambitions that we'd expand the business model and take over the East Coast with more locations," Cohen says. "We opened locations in Philadelphia, two in New York, and two in New Jersey. I was young and foolish, and as we launched five new locations, I was like 'Oh wow, this is not as easy as it looks.'"

While Millennium's custom dashboard provided a view of the data, it didn't do much else, and Cohen quickly scaled operations back to its original installation facility. He serviced new regional clients acquired during the expansion from the one location or from dealers' sites, which required the staff to keep track of where cars and installers were, track installation job status, and what needed to be delivered.

When car manufacturers began to include aftermarket accessories like remote starters and CD disk players and changers based on consumer-demand, Auto Action Group shifted gears and started installing leather seats, sunroofs, and other automotive accessories. But what, Cohen debated, could he do with his electronics installers?

Cohen spotted several trends allowing him to pivot the business: connected cars and distracted driving. Auto Action Group won a bid to install safety devices in 1,600 cars as part of Tampa's Vision Zero project, which is a strategy to eliminate traffic fatalities and severe injuries. First implemented in Sweden in the 1990s, Vision Zero is gaining momentum in the U.S.

"Everyone was talking about the new technologies, but no one was addressing how they would integrate or install it," Cohen says. "We realized it wasn't simple, but we could be key to installing it from an aftermarket perspective."

Company

Auto Action Group
<https://autoactiongroup.com>

Industry

Distribution and Installation:
Aftermarket Automotive Accessories
and Safety Products

Location

Kenilworth, NJ

Number of Employees

Approx. 75 full time employees

Products

Acumatica Advanced Financials with:

- Field Service Management
- Warehouse Management
- Expense Management
- CRM
- Biz-Tech Services Kit Processing

Customer Social Sharing Details

 <https://www.linkedin.com/company/auto-action-group-inc/>

 <https://www.facebook.com/autoactiongroup>

 <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCa0tjsr5kvjKaAlvVISolA>

 <https://www.instagram.com/autoactiongroup/>

Partner Details



PC Bennett Solutions
<https://pcbennett.com>

Larger Clients Required a Better Business Solution

Auto Action Group now has a national footprint of public and private clients in addition to dealers, including Siemens and Verizon, and installs aftermarket safety and accessories on all vehicle types, including school and transit buses, fire, ambulance, and other emergency vehicles.

Growth into new services and a larger number of transactions highlighted the inefficiencies of its Millennium Power Base system and illuminated the business' over-reliance on a programmer to dump data into a spreadsheet and format it so executives could understand it.

As Cohen began researching ERPs, he met Patricia Bennett of PC Bennett Solutions, who helped Cohen better understand ERPs and what they could offer. After looking at Microsoft Dynamics and other ERPs, Cohen met with Bennett and learned more about Acumatica Cloud ERP, what customization Auto Action Group might require, and how the company could operate with Acumatica's Advance Financials with Field Service Management.

SOLUTION

Flexible Platform to Handle Growth

"We needed a flexible, mobile system with inventory management, service-routing and scheduling, and additional capabilities we could offer clients as we grew," Cohen says.

He was not impressed with the off-the-shelf demos and impersonal dealings with Microsoft representatives. "I didn't get a good vibe like I had gotten with Patricia," he says. "She understood our needs as she has experience in the automotive industry, knew Acumatica's capabilities, and I knew she could support us."

With more than 75 employees, Acumatica's unlimited user licensing model based upon transaction volume rather than per-seat played an important role in Cohen's decision. "When we grow, it's nice to know we're not going to get nicked and dined," he says.

Auto Action Group shut down operations for a time when the pandemic hit, which allowed a core team the luxury of deploying Acumatica without daily operations as a distraction.

BENEFITS

Information in Real Time

Acumatica's automated dashboards allow Cohen to understand company financials in a new light. The team is now able to catch errors missed previously.

"The dashboards help us tremendously," he says. "Without a full-time person to analyze the data before, we wouldn't catch things like a wrong standard cost until later in the P&L. Now, we have a dashboard to immediately notify us if something goes awry, items are fixed immediately, and I don't have to worry about making decisions later."

Auto Action Group has greater insight into the business than it did before, which allows Cohen to make better decisions and make them faster. "I've always had hunches, but the availability of the information I have now and the speed at which it's delivered is so much more powerful," he says.

For example, Acumatica's maps and appointment boards help the company better manage drivers who drop off cars or pick them up. "We're able to see how long it takes for someone to go from point A to point B and ask the questions necessary to determine why it take someone else longer. That's a large expense for us: gas, tolls, and drivers' time, so connecting them to the Acumatica brain allows us to look at inefficiencies and determine how to fix them quickly. We never had a grip on that before."



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—Jared Cohen, CEO and Co-Owner,
Auto Action Group

Automated Processes Save Time

Auto Action Group's accounting team saves time because data flows in real-time to the appropriate GL accounts, and credit card expenses are automatically uploaded through Acumatica's mobile application into the financial system. "Credit card expenses were a nightmare," Cohen says. "Now with the mobile app, they are uploaded in real time, which is saving us a lot of time at the end of the month."

Acumatica allows Auto Action Group to send invoices electronically, receive vendor invoices electronically, and is helping the company go paperless.

The company tried to use Salesforce as its CRM at one point, "but it was too complicated for us," says Cohen. "Our customers are mostly car dealers and our sales team calls them daily, and then submits weekly Word documents."

With Acumatica, they now use the Events functionality to load customer information and call results into the system, which allows them to better interpret the data.

The new solution's user interface "is amazing; we love it," Cohen says. "It helped speed 100 percent user adoption. Before, we were using a blue screen. Now we are in the modern era of business."

With Acumatica's mobile application, Auto Action Group's employees can work from anywhere. "Someone could even be on the beach somewhere, and it wouldn't make a difference. Before we had to VPN, which was difficult to use," he says.

Cohen likes that Acumatica easily connects to third party applications through its open API. It uses Biz-Tech Services Kit Processing, which allows them to consolidate 2,000 SKUs of the leather kits it uses for specific dealers. "Biz-Tech allowed us to create an enhanced view, so we don't have to put every single SKU into the system," Cohen says. "We can easily expand the information on an invoice to see what was behind it."

Flexible ERP Grows as Auto Action Group Shifts into Overdrive

Acumatica's flexible and open platform allows Auto Action Group to easily accommodate new customer demands and provides a platform for future growth. "As we start growing with larger nationwide projects, Acumatica allows us to manage the process more efficiently," Cohen says. "Our largest project to date is with the City of New York where we work in 50 depots. Because of Acumatica and the information we can provide, clients have a high level of comfort with us."

"Due to the nature of our work, every week we need to accommodate something new, and Acumatica allows us to do that with attribute functions or minor customization work by our Partner, PC Bennett Solutions," he adds. "Our projects have shifted to more onsite depots. Acumatica allows us to create multiple temporary locations so we can track everything and make sure items go into the right vehicles."

Auto Action Group is still in the beginning stages of learning and using Acumatica to streamline its operations, and Cohen is looking forward to future efficiencies. "We are very pleased with Acumatica's functionality, it is very user-friendly, and we really like its ability to integrate with other systems and applications as we grow," he says.



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