

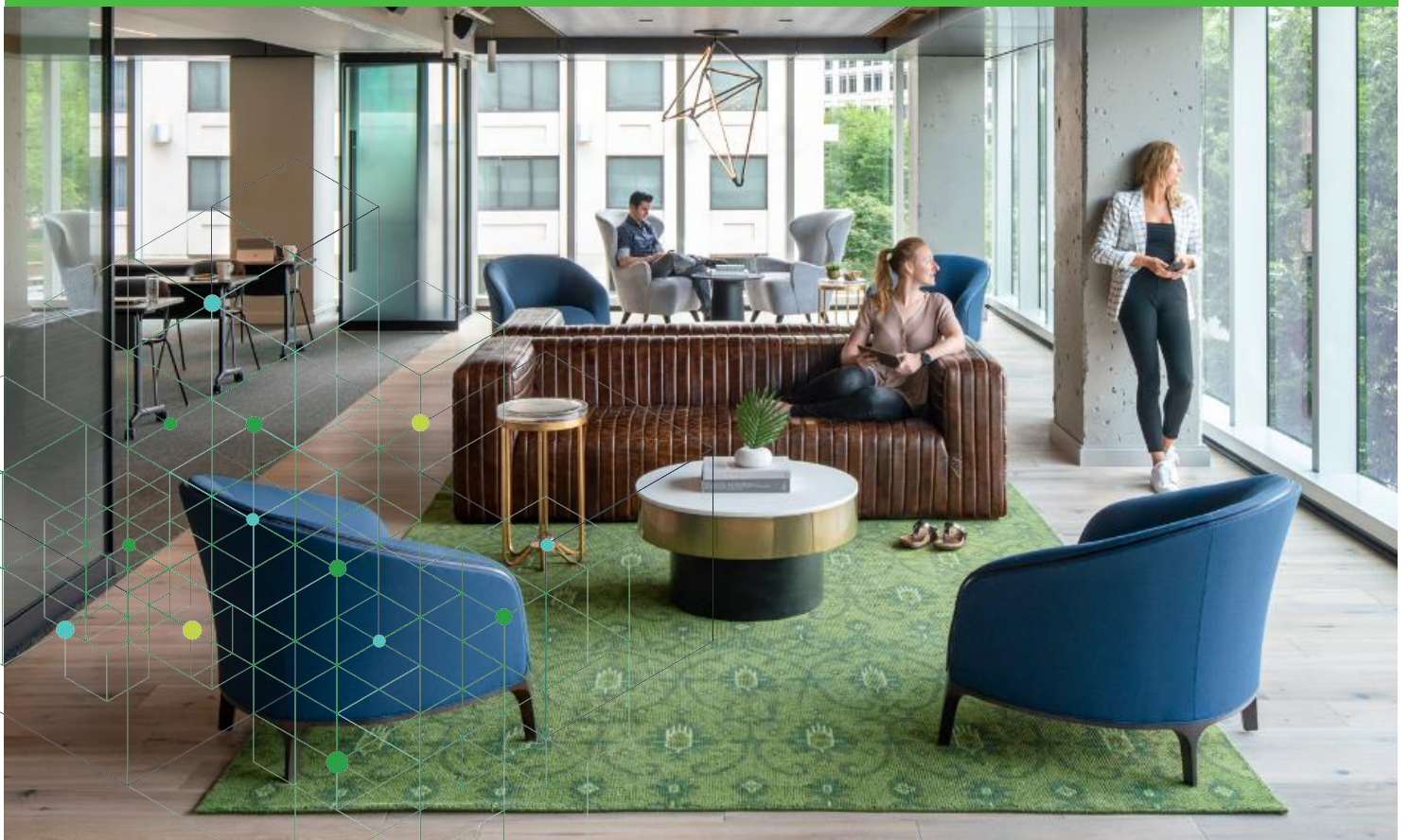


# How Technology improved food security in Africa

The Meridian Group overcomes time-consuming, manual processes



INSIGHT CONSULTING  
Active Intelligence



## CUSTOMER STORY

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“Technology is a key growth driver for our business. It supports our ultimate goal of improving food security in Africa.”

Graeme Vaughan, Chief Information Officer, The Meridian Group

### Creating sustainable living into South East Africa

Meridian’s core business is the importation, blending and distribution of fertilizer in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Fertilizer is sourced from global producers and imported through our port operations in Mozambique to our blending and granulation plants in the region, where they are added to crop and region-specific blends. Distribution to local farmers and organisations in the region is facilitated through our extensive retail and wholesale network.

Meridian supply farms of all sizes, from small-scale farms to commercial farming enterprises, NGOs and government growing schemes.

Meridian focus on developing knowledge, sharing skills and creating jobs in the communities they work amongst.

The original companies making up the group trace their origins back more than 30 years and today the group employs over 3,000 people across the region.

The group is the holding company of 23 subsidiaries across Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe and a meaningful contributor to the agricultural sector in the region.

### Creating an orchestrated harmony

Insight Consulting was tasked by The Meridian Group to interrogate its reporting, budgeting and operational planning process across its entire business. The task at hand was finding a solution that creates an orchestrated harmony between the many moving parts across the various subsidiaries.

This was to be achieved with due consideration for the regulations that governed the way business was conducted in each of the countries they operate in and to source and implement a technology-based solution that integrated strategic operational and budgetary planning across the group.

#### Solution Overview

##### Customer Name

The Meridian Group

##### Industry

Agricultural

##### Geography

Mauritius, Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

##### Function

Manufacture, technical and distribution

##### Business Value Driver

Reimagined Processes, business intelligence

##### Challenges

- Disparate reporting and budgeting processes
- In country regulations across operational footprint
- Inconsistent reporting during their planning and forecasting cycles

##### Solution

The Meridian Group and Insight Consulting implemented Corporate Planning software suite alongside business intelligence software

##### Results

- Solved real budgeting and planning challenges
- Highly complicated consolidated budgets
- Transparent and well-founded business decisions across the group
- Integrated strategic and operational planning

## The legacy problem

Meridian's subsidiaries – each made up of four units: fertiliser blending, fertiliser distribution, retail and production of commodities – caters for all farmers; from small holding to commercial enterprises, NGOs and government growing programs. With this knowledge and an understanding of the crucial role that the group played in Africa's food security, Insight Consulting set out to fundamentally shift a formerly disparate reporting and budgeting process into a consolidated and streamlined business strength

## The intervention

The consulting firm worked closely with the business to formulate and deliver on data strategies at all levels of the organisation. It embarked on a long-term relationship with its client to unlock actionable insights, using the latest thinking and technology across the data value chain.

## The outcome

This approach resulted in the customised implementation of Corporate Planning (CP) software that assists Meridian to overcome the time-consuming, manual burden of the planning process as well as the challenges associated with inconsistent reporting during their planning and forecasting cycles. Meridian is now able to integrate strategic and operational planning to facilitate transparent and well-founded business decisions across the group.

Vaughan says that the benefits of having a shared tool outweigh the time and effort of getting various subsidiaries and users on board. One of the most pleasing outcomes of the implementation, says Vaughan, was the development of a unified culture of corporate excellence, across units and regions.

Reflecting on the partners that walked this transformation journey with his internal team, Vaughan says, "Relationships are key for me in this role because I'm not a technocrat. You need to be able to work with a business partner and have trust that your partner will help you assimilate tools that will make a meaningful impact in the business. You must have faith that the technology your partner is presenting is not just to make money but a real, meaningful solution to a problem that has been identified in the business, with a plan to solve that problem in the least amount of time and with the least disruptions."

Vaughan adds that Insight Consulting and The Meridian Group did not follow the typical steps one would find in a consulting relationship, and that it was organic and evolved on a weekly basis out of necessity.

Shanna Jardim at Insight Consulting agrees, saying that any relationship a partner enters into with a business needs to align on the challenges, the company's policies and their current processes, and then the team must work together closely and methodically to find the right solutions.

"We were able to drill down into the data and find where the misalignment was and then apply the Corporate Planning software suite alongside the business intelligence software to solve real budgeting and planning challenges. This ongoing relationship and our close eye over the data has enabled us to pick up problems, and then take them to Meridian with the right solutions to solve them."

"As a proud South African consultancy, it's been a privilege collaborating with a business that has attached itself to a higher purpose and has great aspirations for our continent," says Jardim.

## The keys to success



### Holistic

Budgeting and process across operational footprint



### Benefits

Transparent and well-informed business decisions across the group.

“Over the years, our organisation – and probably many others with operations as diverse as ours – had been running a set of highly complicated consolidated budgets on an annual basis. This is a mammoth task and there wasn’t much scope for in-depth scenario planning, or at least at the level that an organisation needs to be agile and proactive.”

Graeme Vaughan, Chief Information Officer, The Meridian Group



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### **About Insight Consulting**

Formed in 2007, Insight Consulting is a strategic consulting firm that operates across Southern and East Africa. It is a data specialist that finds its enterprise customers' raw data, frees it from vertical business silos, understands its relevance and actions it into business value for them by using intelligent software and analytical expertise.

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