

## Elders' Digital Transformation

Evolving Australia's Agriculture Industry with a Microsoft Dynamics 365 Based Solution



Innovation and growth have always been top of mind for agricultural organisation Elders. Not only for the Australian agribusinesses and rural communities it supports, but within its own operations. With 185 years of heritage and a nationwide network of approximately 350 branches, Elders was ready to embark on a bold new chapter of success—one underpinned by a digital transformation.

In an industry where agility, data-driven decisions and streamlined operations can be critical for business success, Elders recognised that its legacy infrastructure was becoming a barrier to growth and innovation. Here's how Elders collaborated with Deloitte to reimagine its IT landscape and embark on a digital transformation journey.

### FROM LEGACY TO LATEST: IT INFRASTRUCTURE REVIVAL

A key player within Australia's agriculture industry, Elders' mission has remained the same since its inception 185 years ago: to support the profitability and productivity of farmers and agribusinesses across the country. Offering a comprehensive range of

products and services, from livestock and wool trading to farm supplies and real estate services, Elders operates within a framework—dubbed internally as the “Eight Point Plan”—designed to achieve sustainable growth and deliver customer service excellence across all facets of the business.

Within this strategy, Elders also placed priority on modernising its technology infrastructure. Indeed, upgrading its IT environment—a long history of legacy systems and in-house platforms across departments—became a critical priority to ensure Elders could continue delivering value to its clients and remain competitive in a digitally connected world.

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*“Our current application, a homegrown custom ERP that we built over the last 34 years, has 14.5 million lines of code over 16,000 thousand programs. We have close to 200 integrations between intra-platform and our external third parties.”*

—Joe La Vista, Head of Technology—  
Systems Modernisation (SysMod), Elders

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These disparate systems limited Elders' timely responses to market changes and efficient communication across the numerous areas of its business. Compounded with a rapidly changing environment, it became clear that maintaining ageing technology was unsustainable and posed risks to Elders' growth ambition and their ability to meet strategic goals.

Faced with these challenges, Elders sought a comprehensive solution that could integrate its operations, drive consistent processes across the business and support a culture of continuous improvement. The goal emerged: an IT infrastructure refresh that not only aligned with Elders' Eight Point Plan but could also help future-proof its operations against emerging risks and opportunities.

### TAKING TO THE CLOUD

To assist the company through the complexities of a large-scale digital transformation, Elders looked to Deloitte as its advisor and systems integrator, recognising Deloitte's deep industry knowledge and proven track record in delivering Microsoft-based transformations.

Elders had independently chosen the Microsoft technology stack as the foundation for its digital transformation, recognising its robust capabilities in delivering cloud-based, scalable solutions. The selection of Microsoft Dynamics 365 would cover areas including finance, supply chain, operations, commerce and CRM functions, utilising Azure integration technology to replace its legacy systems.

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*"Elders came out to market to find a solution implementer for their Microsoft Dynamics implementation. Through our initial conversations, we saw that we were a natural fit with the organisation, that we could help Elders in planning, designing and implementing their digital transformation objectives and the collaboration started from the beginning."*

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—Nuno Pimentel, Engagement Lead, Deloitte Australia

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The transformation was not just a technology upgrade but a reimagining of Elders' operations. By migrating to the cloud, Elders could set a solid foundation for future growth. They could create new opportunities and introduce better, more efficient ways to do business, such as the ability to leverage real-time data insights, enhance collaboration across their branch network, and improve decision-making processes. Centralising operations on a unified platform also allowed Elders to respond more quickly to market demands and deliver consistent experiences to its customers.



However, migrating to a cloud system like Microsoft Dynamics is a complex and multi-layered process. To ensure the digital transformation would support future business change and core operating areas, Elders designed the multi-year program into multiple waves, each with its own business and operational focus:

- Wave 1 saw Dynamics 365 deployed for Indirect Procurement, Fixed Assets and General Ledger. Workday was also deployed as the core people system; websites were replaced, and an enterprise data platform was deployed to enable better customer insights and data-led decision-making.
- Wave 2 includes Dynamics 365 as the new store commerce system in all branches.
- Subsequent waves will see the replacement of livestock and trading settlements, remaining financial systems and CRM, plus the decommissioning of the 35-year-old legacy AS400 platform.



## A CULTURED EVOLUTION

The collaboration between Elders and Deloitte was built on trust and a shared commitment to success. From the outset, a “one team” approach was taken, ensuring that Deloitte’s offering portfolios were fully integrated with Elders’ internal teams and industry experts.

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*“In the early discussions with Deloitte, we discussed and agreed on the mantra of ‘winning together.’ We understand ag [agriculture], we understand our clients, we understand our internal environment, and we wanted Deloitte to help us bridge the gap of Dynamics 365 unknowns and get to the finish line faster.”*

—Viv Da Ros,  
Chief Information Officer, Elders

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Cultural alignment was critical to navigating the complexities of the transformation as both teams focused on delivering outcomes that aligned with Elders’ strategic objectives.

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*“Deloitte proved to be very collaborative. Elders have their own culture, and what we found is, as soon as Deloitte came in, they quickly fit in. The Elders subject matter experts (SMEs) were quite comfortable working with Deloitte and vice versa. It was a natural relationship that developed with a lot of respect and trust between the two organisations.”*

—Joe La Vista, Head of Technology—  
Systems Modernisation (SysMod), Elders

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Deloitte's experience was instrumental in ensuring that the technology solution was tailored to Elders' business needs. Conducting around 130 design and future-state workshops with Elders' key SMEs, Deloitte worked with the Elders team to understand the synergies between their people, processes and technology to effectively determine a future-proof system architecture.

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*"In the first stage [of a transformation] you have to think about the end goal. How is the future going to look? Who is the end user? How will they most efficiently use the system to serve clients and achieve the intended business outcomes? The workshop and early-phase discovery allowed us to get a deep understanding of Elders' agricultural operations and uncover processes where efficiencies could be improved."*

—Nuno Pimentel, Engagement Lead, Deloitte Australia

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It was during these workshops that Elders and Deloitte finalised much of the design required to commence the build process. Deloitte's role also extended beyond supporting Elders' SMEs with implementing the technology. Deloitte worked closely with the Elders SysMod team to shape the direction of the implementation by:

- Aligning Deloitte people with Elders' ways of working, creating a seamless and collaborative environment.
- Identifying a human-centric design approach that considers Elders' end-user and communication style.
- Creating a unified Solution Architecture Document that outlined the scope, design options, priorities and technology guidelines.
- Defining comprehensive strategies for change management, training, integration, testing, data migration and reporting.
- Providing supply chain and industry-specific knowledge to ensure the business context was central to the technology solution.
- Sequencing implementation activities to align with the business outcomes identified by Elders' governance executives.





## BUILDING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

The migration to Microsoft Dynamics is one of the most complex transformation programs Elders has embarked on due to its business diversity and technical complexities. To deliver success now and in the future, ensuring the platform could evolve alongside Elders' business needs was essential. The unique collaboration with Deloitte, and working "shoulder-to-shoulder," equipped Elders with the right support to anticipate challenges, carefully plan the transformation phases and pivot quickly where needed to keep the project on track. By living the Elders mantra "By Elders, For Elders," Deloitte focused on providing best practice guidance during the implementation, while Elders took the lead of the overall program.

The strategic alignment and agreed long-term value vision between the two organisations also enabled Elders to minimise the change impact and lay the groundwork for future business improvements and innovations. The successful transformation delivered several key benefits for Elders:

- "To better serve our clients"—A modernised IT and data platform that aligned with the company's Eight Point Plan, driving efficiency and enhancing customer experience.
- "To work smarter and easier"—The ability to support new ways of working, which is crucial for maintaining long-term productivity and profitability for clients.
- "To be ready for further change"—A platform to suit any business model, as customer needs, market opportunities and technologies emerge.
- A collaboration that understood the culture and unique challenges of the agriculture industry, allowing for a seamless transformation journey.

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*"We've certainly had positive feedback from the business. Overall, Deloitte helped us think holistically about the whole program. [They] came in with that design thinking and architecture knowledge and provided us with a strong framework to be able to deliver a successful program."*

—Joe La Vista, Head of Technology—  
Systems Modernisation (SysMod), Elders

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Elders' desire to innovate externally, but also transform internally, has positioned Elders as a data-led, agile organisation. What is notable about this digital transformation is that it has established the foundation to help Elders plan for and harness the possibilities that artificial intelligence can play in combing through large amounts of data and analysing it to provide advanced insights to the business.

As Elders digital transformation evolves, so does its readiness to navigate the complexities of the agriculture industry while remaining committed to supporting the communities it serves.



“Data analytics and insights remains a great opportunity for Elders. The current state is that our data is fragmented across several ERPs. Part of system modernisation is to bring that data together. From my perspective, that will be a light bulb moment for Elders and bring in opportunities for the use of artificial intelligence to analyse that data and provide advanced analytics to the business.”

Paul Rossiter  
Chief Financial Officer, Elders

## GET IN TOUCH

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