

# CASE STUDY

## ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

The American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation (Birkie), which was once known as a small ski event, has evolved into North America's largest cross-country ski race. The event has become such a big attraction that over the years, Birkie has added other races including events for running and biking. A non-profit organization, Birkie supports their local community and other philanthropic efforts throughout the Midwest as part of what is known as the "Birkie lifestyle," which promotes a healthy, active outdoor lifestyle while giving back to the community.

The trail starts in Cable, Wisconsin; passes through the Birkie trail and the Northwoods; and finishes on Hayward, Wisconsin's Main Street. Collectively, Hayward and Cable have about 2,800 people, however, the annual Birkebeiner ski event brings on average 40,000 spectators and participants to the area, with over a quarter million people having participated in the Birkie week ski races to date. "When you host an event of this size, obviously it's a lot of stress," says Ben Popp, Executive Director for the American Birkebeiner Ski Foundation. "There are a lot of moving parts, and successfully managing our registrant data often-times can be one of the most difficult and stressful components of it."

Because the Birkie Ski Race is such a large event with multiple registrants and variants of races, they faced challenges in that even though they could gather the data they needed, accessing and utilizing it was nearly impossible. They needed a database solution, and that solution was Dynamics 365 for Sales and Marketing so they could utilize their data in better ways. Prior to Dynamics 365, Birkie stored data via spreadsheet, which wasn't easily usable or searchable. Storing data in Dynamics 365 allows Birkie to search by criteria such as how many years a skier has done a race, where that skier is from, how many of Birkie's people have participated, and more. By being able to surface and interpret their historical data, Birkie can put on an overall better event in the future.

## SOLUTION

With the help of PowerObjects, The American Birkebeiner Association rolled out Dynamics 365 for Sales and Dynamics 365 for Marketing. Data management was one of the biggest challenges they faced as an organization, and the functionality within Dynamics 365 allowed their staff to communicate more efficiently, handle high-volume registrations, and manage event planning.

Birkie had over 43 years of historical data accumulated. "To go through the process of taking our data from paper and pencil, to rudimentary spreadsheets, and finally into a CRM with our Dynamics 365 solution, has made a huge difference," says Popp. "With Dynamics 365, we can actually use our data now." Dynamics 365 for Sales' built-in mobility has strengthened Birkie's communication execution with the public as well as helped their organization and the events they organize grow in popularity, especially with the registration process.

Birkie's registration process has been streamlined extensively with Dynamics 365. Additionally, PowerObjects' registration add-on for Dynamics 365, Power-ZapEvent, is easy for staff to use and manage. It also makes the registration process clear and ensures that the data received is organized and easily accessible. When participants register online, automated workflows from within Dynamics 365 trigger email confirmations to both the registrant and event staff. The event staff then perform what's called a wave assignment execution. PowerObjects helped Birkie develop this custom algorithm in Dynamics 365 to auto-generate



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MAXIMIZING THE VALUE  
OF HISTORIC DATA,  
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ENCE OF CURRENT  
REGISTRANTS, AND  
ENSURING SCALABILITY  
FOR FUTURE GROWTH.*

## PRAISE FOR POWEROBJECTS

*“Dynamics 365 has allowed us to provide experiences that are second to none, ones that people won’t forget and that they want come back for.”*

BEN POPP

Executive Director

American Birkiebeiner Ski Foundation

## SOLUTIONS |CONTINUED|

race placement by looking at previous years' race results. The wave placement looks at the registrant's previous three years' time and automatically places them in the appropriate wave. New registrations are automatically placed in the last wave of each race, while elite, experienced skiers are automatically placed in the first wave. The process gives registrants instant feedback to confirm successful registrations.

## BENEFITS

Implementing Dynamics 365 has revolutionized Birkie's ability to communicate with participants, manage registrations leading up to, on, and after each event, and ensure scalability as Birkie continues to grow. The platform has helped not only Birkie's staff, but also their participants. “It's allowed us to provide experiences that are second to none, ones that people won't forget and that they want come back for,” says Popp.

Having their information in Microsoft Cloud is very important to Birkie because their races take place over a wide geography. With races starting and stopping in various locations, Birkie's staff is often not in the office to access important data. Using Dynamics 365 online allows staff to access information from anywhere, ultimately resulting in Birkie being able to grow their races, both in distance and in participants, year over year.

Dynamics 365 is used every day by Birkie, even on race day. Birkie's event staff uses Dynamics 365 to distribute race bibs, confirm event registrations, and more. After each race is finished, Birkie staff imports the results into Dynamics 365, where they will be used for marketing communications and next year's registration placement.

## Partnering with PowerSuccess

Birkie is a member of PowerObjects' PowerSuccess program, a completely unique service-as-a-subscription program that gives you access to a CRM administrator for your Dynamics 365 system and a long-term plan for success for a predictable monthly fee. One of the biggest benefits of partnering with PowerSuccess is being able to access a CRM expert on a regular cadence. Birkie's dedicated PowerSuccess engineer knows their system in and out and is dedicated to seeing Birkie succeed. That level of commitment and passion means that Birkie's PowerSuccess engineer has attended events personally, so he understands exactly how Birkie needs to use the data, what to use it for, and how to store and surface that data most effectively. “PowerObjects took us step-by-step through the processes,” says Popp. “We felt very comfortable with them as an organization from the beginning. Their attention to detail, their PowerPacks, and their PowerSuccess program really rounded out the solution and has provided everything we needed.”



## CHALLENGE

Unorganized and underutilized data.

## SOLUTION

A unified platform that Birkie's event staff and participants can benefit from, even when they're out on the slopes.

## BENEFITS

- + Maximized value of historical data
- + Streamlined registration process
- + Optimized marketing tools
- + Ongoing support for Birkie's staff

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## BENEFITS |CONTINUED|

Birkie and their PowerSuccess engineer work closely to provide solutions and innovative ways to tackle problems and to determine best practices. Birkie's Dynamics 365 system is extremely customized, so working with a PowerSuccess engineer allows them to design a system that best fits their unique business needs. If issues arise within Dynamics 365, their engineer is able to easily troubleshoot those and get them resolved quickly and effectively.

### Streamlining Event Management with PowerPacks

PowerObjects offers a range of add-ons for Dynamics 365 called PowerPacks. Because of Birkie's unique business needs, many of these PowerPacks were able to come in handy, providing a solution with exactly the functionality needed, without having to create additional, time-consuming customizations.

PowerZapEvent is one of the PowerPacks that Birkie uses. It acts as their exclusive event management engine to bring all online registrations straight into Dynamics 365. With PowerZapEvent, Birkie maintains their event data for every race, year over year, including revenue numbers, total registrants, and more. Together, Dynamics 365 and PowerZapEvent have streamlined their entire business process and provided a platform with easy-to-reference and organized data. Now, Birkie is equipped to make better marketing decisions for each event with PowerZapEvent's ability to automate marketing tasks for each event such as sending promotional offers and distributing surveys for shirt sizes. Not only that, but PowerZapEvent's user interface is simple and easy for staff and registrants to navigate.

Birkie also uses PowerMailChimp to communicate with participants, sponsors, vendors, volunteers, and media contacts. Working right out of Dynamics 365, they are able to create customizable marketing lists that can be updated in real-time. Using the robust MailChimp designer interface, they are then able to create custom communications tailored specifically to each marketing list. "For events like the Birkie Trail Run Festival, PowerMailChimp gives me the ability to reach out to all of our participants with customized messages based on whether they're running in the Ultra, the 5k, or are a general participant in the event," says Nancy Knutson, Director of Marketing and Communications for Birkie. "PowerMailChimp made it easy for our staff to get each participant the materials they need such as registration confirmations and participant guides."

PowerMailChimp is used to send registration reminders and updates; the participant guide with logistics about race day; to share media kits with the press; and any changes or adjustments to the race week agenda. Birkie also uses PowerMailChimp to send their bi-annual newsletter, Worth It, that contains a variety of special offers curated specifically for Birkie participants by event sponsors.

Because Birkie has multiple events running concurrently, they use PowerGlobalSearch to easily find registration participant records. Each contact record in Dynamics 365 contains information specific to that registrant, such as how many races they are registered for, what wave they've been assigned, wave history, and event orders without having to open multiple record types.

With the help of PowerObjects, Birkie continues to deliver exceptional experiences for their participants and foster relationships with authentic and personal engagement. Future plans for Birkie include automating even more of their marketing and registrant communications and using PowerPacks to handle the bib distribution process. "I think PowerObjects is a thought leader in the Dynamics 365 community," says Popp. "The expertise, confidence, and support they bring is something that allows us to thrive as an organization and ultimately focus on growth."



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