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British Gymnastics Project Story

"Black Pepper have been brilliant to work with. The whole team have brought value to the project. Brilliant account and project managers plus impressive expertise from technical to UX to agile mentoring and training. We are now working on our next project with the team and I have already recommended them to fellow colleagues."

Joe Harrison, IT Director British Gymnastics



The Beginning

British Gymnastics, originally founded in 1888, is the sport governing body for gymnastics in the UK. British Gymnastics play a key part in driving the development, delivery, promotion and success of the sport. Participation is rising, the fan base is growing, and the medal-winning British Team has never been so prolific.

Membership has grown dramatically over the past 7 years to over 400,000 members. In order to support this fast membership growth British Gymnastics launched an incentive to grow their digital and technical capabilities.

Some challenges

The project faced some key challenges one of which surrounded membership renewal. Due to club insurance renewing annually, all club members were required to renew their membership with British Gymnastics within the space of a few weeks. This has in turn placed pressure on British Gymnastics's customer services team who were the recipients of many requests for assistance.

Data, gathered by British Gymnastics's insights team, led to an initiative driven by the Board of Directors and lead by Joe Harrison (Head of IT). The initiative highlighted that a members portal should be developed that delivered an improved user experience and the scaling capabilities required to support 360,000 membership renewals simultaneously.

Joe and the Black Pepper team quickly identified the epicentre of the challenges faced by the IT department at British Gymnastics. While carrying a heavy workload across the business, they were being pulled from one IT request to another with no automated system to prioritise the backlog of work leaving very little time to improve.

While skilled and very capable, the team needed an injection of experience to deliver a solution offering the UX and scalability required. British Gymnastics expressed an interest in upskilling the team and adopting some agile methodologies to help streamline and prioritise requests from the wider business.



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The engagement of any third party would need to deliver sustainable resolution to these challenges along with a system that could comfortably login 360,000 new members (alongside registration) from Sept 1st and even more members as the business continued to grow.

Getting started

Following the evaluation process and a short Discovery phase of work, Black Pepper were selected in May 2018 to deliver the following objectives:

- Assist Joe to re-evaluate how the team were prioritising work and make time for learning.
- Build the new membership site
- Mentor the British Gymnastics technical team in both agile practices and a new tech stack (to include Java, Spring, AWS and implementing automated testing)

12 weeks later, the new system was operational. Functionality included a User Centered Design approach. This meant that members could renew in just 2 minutes.

The system was also fully integrated with British Gymnastics CRM and Sage pay systems. To ensure future success, half of the British Gymnastics tech team were trained and capable of managing and building upon the new site going forward.

From a technical perspective, the solution was

built with optimal flexibility and scalability in mind. The system was deployed on AWS using comprehensive auto-scaling and a continuous deployment pipeline.

Go Live

On September 1st members reported that they logged on and renewed their memberships with ease.

The technical bit:

“We identified the need for a scalable solution to support the high volumes of traffic during the peak renewal period. The need to process thousands of renewal fees including integration with Sage Pay and British Gymnastics’ CRM required a tech stack capable of complex and important business transactions. Building on the enterprise ready Spring platform, and deploying on AWS Elastic Container Services provided these capabilities. To cater for the changing business requirements, Black Pepper championed agile practises including test automation and a continuous deployment pipeline offering repeatable and thus reliable frequent releases.”

So what next?

Following a challenging but successful project British Gymnastics are continuing to engage with Black Pepper to aid continuous improvement. The next project remains top secret, for now.

“By following a user-centred design approach, we were able to quickly identify pain points with the current system. An iterative process of rapid prototyping and journey mapping allowed us to refine the user interface and streamline the task of renewing a membership. The outcome is an optimised renewal process that needs only 2 minutes to complete. Another key factor of success, was designing the new user interface using responsive design principles, as over 70% of users renewed their memberships on a mobile device.”

Chris McCourt, Project UX Lead, Black Pepper

