



W.H. Bass casts off with new software

Reels in better efficiency and productivity

W.H. Bass Inc., was as busy as ever in 2004, so much so that CFO David Carr knew the firm could no longer afford to duplicate effort.

Carr set out to upgrade the software for this leading builder of stand-alone, multi-location structures such as fast food restaurants, convenience stores and banking offices. He and his accounting team had been using MAS90, a Best software product, for several years. While MAS90 had delivered some value, it was not designed specifically for the construction industry. As a result, Carr and his team had to create several separate systems to process business activity. To get billings to the owner, for example, he had to create excel spreadsheets on another system. Carr also had to produce a master job database to track important data such as client contacts and project start and end dates.

“We could not get everything we needed under one umbrella,” Carr stated. “We would often have to create a new database base and then merge it with the MAS90 program. It was duplication of effort.”

As a result, Bass had no way to share online accounting data with project managers and superintendents. So whenever a project manager wanted information – job reports, owner billings, or subcontractor data – one of Carr’s six accounting staff members would have to print a hard copy and have it delivered.

As a leader in the field, Bass has a mountain of data to maintain. Based in Norcross, Ga., this general contractor has completed over 1,400 structures in 24 states, concentrating in the southeast. Today Bass completes between 40-60 projects a year, serving such well-known names as Chick-fil-A, Cracker Barrel and Discount Tire. Its geographic scope is wide – running primarily from Texas to Virginia but also reaching into the upper Midwest.

It was in 2004 that Carr decided his team needed an industry-specific software package. He conducted a thorough search, poring over Web sites and trade magazines that provided background on the broad array of accounting software programs specific to the construction industry. He narrowed the field to four finalists, but three were from outside the area. As he worked through the search, Carr began to see the value in choosing a local provider.

“There were some good products but I was not comfortable dealing long distance,” Carr commented. “I wanted a local partner I could rely on.”

An experienced user of software, Carr figured that ongoing support would be crucial.

"I knew I would have problems," he said. "It's easy to learn the software, but it's hard learning how to correct the errors you make."

Carr opted to go with a local company – The Strategies Group – and its Timberline software. It was a comfortable decision on many fronts. Carr knew Strategies Group president Randy Collins, and more so, he was aware of Timberline's reputation as a leading product for the industry.

In the fall of 2004, Bass purchased the entire Timberline Accounting package. Under the lead of Strategies Group consultant Jenny Evans, the two companies set up a timetable to manage the conversion on January 1, 2005. The timetable was not ideal, as Carr and his accounting team underwent training in the days before and after the holidays. But they got it done, and when the time came to convert, Evans and her team camped out at Bass for two weeks to help ensure a seamless transition.

"The conversion went more smoothly than any I have been involved in," Carr observed. "Jenny Evans knew exactly the sequence of events we needed to follow, and she did a good job of keeping us on track."

The payoff has been huge. With all accounting data now accessible in a single Timberline software program, Carr has been able to eliminate duplicate systems. In a logical next step, Bass has purchased the Timberline Project Management module. Last month, Carr and seven project managers were trained on how to use that system.

"Our project managers are excited about the potential of this product," Carr remarked. "They know that as they learn to use it, they can be much more efficient in managing their work."

One feature on the Project Management module that is especially attractive is an address book that managers can use to track vendors, suppliers and subcontractors. That capability is especially valued at Bass, given the firm's broad geographic footprint.

Looking ahead, Carr wants to help Timberline and the Strategies Group take this software to an even higher level.

"There are still some things that we think could be improved in the software," he said. "We have shared some ideas with Timberline, and we look forward to hearing about their plans."

Still, Carr said he feels good about the first six months of what he expects to be a 12-18 month project. By then, he expects Bass employees to be able to make full use of the Timberline products. And in getting there, he is confident he has the support he needs.

"I would highly recommend Strategies Group," he observed. "They know their stuff, and they have done everything they can to make this process as painless as possible."

