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A BST Software Case Study at Conestoga-Rovers & Associates

EXCELLENT SERVICE FROM A DISTANCE

By Michael Burns

Situation: Conestoga-Rovers & Associates (CRA) is a family of companies providing comprehensive engineering, environmental consulting, construction, and information technology (IT) services. CRA has grown to over 45 offices and more than 1,450 people working on projects around the world.

CRA's group of companies used seven different accounting systems.

Information was re-keyed, and extra time was spent reconciling the various systems. CRA's head office was using a custom system that was limited to two companies and two currencies.

So, CRA started to look at alternatives. After performing their due diligence, which included visits to BST customers, BST Enterprise was selected by CRA in June 2000 to replace all the existing systems.

Solution: BST Software has about 400 clients worldwide with about 15 in Canada. The privately-held BST group of companies and alliance partners employs nearly 300 employees worldwide with headquarters in Tampa, Florida.

Founded in 1978, BST has focused exclusively on solutions for Professional Service Organizations. BST's flagship product, BST Enterprise, includes Finan-

cial Management, Project Management, Resource Management, and Time-Expense Management.

There are 1,450 CRA employees entering time across North America, as well as 260 project managers on the BST system. Project managers have online access to project and A/R information. They can drill down to see each hour or expense related to a project. CRA now has 11 of their companies and over 30 offices on BST all running off a central server in Waterloo, Ontario. Some offices are linked with T1 lines. Others have high speed access over the internet using VPN.

Challenges: CRA decided to fast track the implementation and set a target of January 2001 to be live with the BST Enterprise system. This date was set despite BST's advice that the implementation would take 9 to 12 months. The biggest challenge was getting management across the different companies to agree on the setup of the system. As predicted by BST, the implementation took about nine months.

By April 2001, five of the companies were up and running on BST Enterprise. Today there are 11 companies on BST Enterprise, but there are still a few more to go. It's a big job to con-

vert from existing systems, especially when there were so many different ones from which to convert.

CRA opted to convert manually and hired temps to key in the data.

There has been some resistance to change, especially for some of the older employees who preferred the reports to be delivered in hard copy as done in the past. It takes a strong management team to change the culture of an organization.

BST Enterprise does include expense reporting, but CRA has so far opted not to implement it. The problem is that the system does not automatically calculate GST, which needs to be backed out manually from expense reports.

However, in April 2003 BST will release a new version of the expense reporting system, which will include more user friendly GST processing, and CRA will then roll it out to the employees.

One of the CRA companies operates out of Quebec. Initially there was a problem with the decimal separator, which is a comma in Quebec. This problem was fixed promptly by BST. Using Crystal reports, CRA was also able to create invoices in French.

Costs: The cost of a system varies depending on a variety of factors. BST's pricing algorithm

has changed since CRA purchased it.

Today a system that supports 100 users would cost about \$30,000 US and a system to support 1,000 users would cost about \$300,000 US. BST implementation costs at CRA were relatively low. CRA estimates that only 25 per cent of the licence fees were spent on implementation fees to BST. This was attributed to manually converting the existing systems, and taking a "train-the-trainer" approach (BST trained a few key people who trained the rest of the staff).

Benefits: Although CRA has increased their staff by about 25 per cent over the last two years, there has been only a 3-per-cent increase in accounting administration.

Another significant benefit was the reduction in time to issue invoices. The BST Enterprise application automates the billing process so that extra time is not spent in manually creating invoices. And because of the tight schedule, CRA has been able to send the invoices eight days earlier than before the BST Enterprise system.

CRA expects that this time savings can reasonably be shortened an additional two to three days over the next year. Other benefits include being able to respond to customers more

quickly, having more control over projects and reducing the time to close the month. Some of the CRA companies used to close their month-ends in 45 days. It now takes 25 days.

Bottom Line: Although BST Software operates out of Tampa, CRA is very pleased with support. There have been weekends and nights that BST came to the rescue of CRA. Distance is no longer an issue when it comes to support.

By signing on to the system remotely, BST is able to diagnose and fix problems from Tampa.

According to Joan Norster, Controller and Project Manager of the BST Enterprise implementation, CRA is pleased with its decision to implement BST Enterprise.

The problems of inter-company processing and multi currency are resolved. Although the system was expensive, it has already paid for itself. And Joan continues to receive "excellent service" from BST Software.

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