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A BusinessVision Case Study WALK, DON'T RUN

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Situation: ASB Heating Elements Limited manufactures industrial process heaters to heat liquids, gas, air, water, oil, ovens, tanks, or any industrial process.

ASB has about 35 employees in their Toronto facility. About three years ago, they decided their existing Simply Accounting System was not meeting their needs.

The biggest problem was that Simply Accounting at that time was not multi-user, and they required more than 10 users to access the system simultaneously. They also spent a lot of time re-keying information.

For example, they wrote a customer's order on paper, then re-wrote the same information on a packing slip, and then keyed the same information into the accounting system as an invoice.

Objectives: The objectives for the new system included streamlining operations to eliminate re-keying information, and generating more professional documentation for clients such as order confirmations or packing slips.

Solution: Based on a recommendation from a business partner, they checked into BusinessVision. After a demonstration, they liked what they saw and they also liked the price.

They were not looking for a system to automate their manufacturing process. They just wanted general ledger, accounts receivable, accounts payable, inventory, order

processing and purchasing.

BusinessVision recommended Rowie Walker & Associates Inc. to do the training and implementation. Rowie Walker & Associates specialize in BusinessVision with a team of 12 consultants with accounting and technical expertise. For about \$7,000 in software and \$3,000 in services, ASB had their solution. Three years later, they are still happy with BusinessVision and Rowie Walker & Associates.

Challenges: ASB does not use BusinessVision's bill of materials system. A bill of materials system should allow ASB to define all the components in making their products.

When finished goods are assembled, the raw materials are consumed, so ASB does not control raw materials using BusinessVision.

To compensate, ASB stocks excess inventory to ensure that enough raw materials are always available. ASB also has a semi-automated system (using Excel) for creating work orders (which contain the bill of material) for the plant, but it is not integrated with BusinessVision.

So what's the problem? Most of ASB's products are custom and their belief is that too much effort is required to create a bill of material for each new product.

Sure you could copy and modify existing bills of material, but there is still the concern that too much effort will be required to implement bills of material using BusinessVision.

The problem is not lack of sophistication at ASB. ASB employees know their business and

have worked with other systems at other jobs, where bill of material as well as full MRP (Material Requirements Planning) was implemented. Part of the problem is that their experience with these other systems was not positive.

Once burned, twice shy. So does it make sense for a manufacturing company to use a product like BusinessVision? I asked this question to BusinessVision and Rowie Walker.

According to BusinessVision, about 20 per cent of their customers are light manufacturers. Many of these manufacturers may have balked at the price tag of full-blown manufacturing systems. Others may have not needed all the functionality including work orders, production scheduling, routings and engineering changes. Customization and a few reports may be all that is needed or BusinessVision customers with more demanding manufacturing could link with third-party products such as Seradex.

Another challenge is contact management. BusinessVision only provides for one contact in the customer file. ASB investigated a number of alternatives that were either considered too expensive or did not provide multi-user functionality.

So they have just started to use a new product from BusinessVision called Workbook, which can be used to customize their system and allows up to 50 new fields to each major BusinessVision module. So ASB has created its own contact management system. For more demanding contact management, BusinessVi-

sion provides both one- and two-way synchronizations with ACT, Maximizer, Goldmine and Outlook.

ASB also struggled initially with system crashes that occurred as frequently as three times per week. Part of the problem was workstations and network were not setup optimally. ASB decided to use their internal resource to setup the network.

After running into problems, ASB agreed to bring in Rowie Walker's technical resource, who quickly tuned the network to meet BusinessVision requirements. Other improvements included installation of UPS (Uninterrupted Power Supply), upgrade from Windows 98 to Windows 2000, and implementation of an anti-virus program. And about a year ago, ASB upgraded to BusinessVision's Pervasive SQL product. The Pervasive SQL product has also eliminated complaints about performance.

Pervasive SQL is a client/server product, which means that when a user/workstation requests information from the database such as one customer, the server only sends the one customer requested rather than the entire customer file. For systems with more than 10 users or heavy volumes, a client/server approach can significantly reduce network traffic and reduce the risk of network problems leading to system crashes.

Results: ASB not only achieved its original objectives but also obtained other benefits from BusinessVision.

ASB has undergone substantial growth over the last few years and no additional administrative staff needed to be hired. As well, they attribute some of their growth to BusinessVision as result of the professional appearance of their docu-

mentation, and their ability to access information requested by clients instantly.

Rowie Walker also thinks that certain benefits are taken for granted. BusinessVision differentiates itself from other products by providing real-time updates to the general ledger for all transactions including those that are multi-currency transactions. ASB can get up-to-the-minute financial information at the press of a key.

Once in a while, ASB comes up with a new report requirement. The last time this happened, Rowie Walker told them they already created a similar report, and they could download it from their Web site for \$75.

In other cases, ASB has requested new reports can be developed by Rowie Walker & Associates for an average investment of \$200. ASB could learn Crystal Report Writer and do the custom reports themselves, but their occasional need has not justified having their own in-house expertise.

Conclusion: ASB prefers to walk before it runs. By taking a slow and cautious approach, they have avoided a costly implementation or costly interruptions to their business. Is it a coincidence that ASB chose Rowie Walker, whose name perfectly fits the walk- don't-run approach?

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