

ERP White Paper
Follow-up to Technology Briefing 02/2002
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In February I delivered an update detailing much of what had been accomplished and what we were poised to deliver. Since then our direction has become clearer and the need for a fully integrated system to manage our separate task is even more urgent. We spent the past six months at an individual level focusing on steps to work smarter. This mandate indicated that even though people are normally resistant to change; the overall benefits of the proposed system had already garnered us an enthusiastic and receptive team. Everyone recognized that sharing the information in the unified system will reduce costs, increase efficiency, and improve our vital relationships.

The concept of integration lies at the very heart of what we wanted. The original idea was to create a software based system that combined an integrated database, uniform practices, HR compliance and a web based interface to tie together our essential corporate information and business processes. Our concept was one based on the ERP, or enterprise resource planning model. ERP is typically based on a core software system which integrates information used by an organization's many different functions and departments into a unified system. The aim is to improve the interaction between all the departments such as the sales, recruiting, workforce management, marketing, accounting, HR and customer service. That means that instead of using isolated departmental data to manage information, such as employee records, company data, job orders, and billing; everyone in the company relies on specific portions of the same systems data.

The Challenge -

Business processes usually extend beyond the confines of a single office or even a single company. In our case, we have 5 sales offices managing employees in 30 different states and Canada. Each of whom worked with of a variety of heavily customized systems and software, some dating back to 1983. Each office and department often used different systems and techniques to manage that information. Information might also be duplicated many times within an office without necessarily being identical or similarly up-to-date. Some of this information might only have been on paper, making it almost impossible to access it across the entire organization. Compounding the problem was our Headquarters' need to monitor and act as primary coordinator.

The Goal -

Early ERP adopters often got locked in to outdated hardware & software, awkward infrastructure, and huge overhead: a system that often required them fitting their needs to the system instead of the other way around. For a system that you will depend on for nearly every step of the process, this was unacceptable. The best solutions are created with the future in mind. We believed the ability to grow, change and migrate to better systems in the future should be a critical factor in our development planning. We began working with principals from DIAWS Consulting in Atlanta; a force that has developed solutions for Headhunter.net, NAPS, Jobs.com, Blockbuster entertainment and more. DIAWS helped us identify and focus on our processes as a whole. Then assist us in determining what portions to integrate first.

With our distributed workforce and regional offices our needs were compounded by the multiple roles and services we offer and the need to have our solution be Web Based. After a lengthy review process we selected Pursuant Technology (a DIAWS affiliate and Microsoft Solutions provider) as our tier 1 provider. We pushed our provider to adopt an even more open and flexible architecture to support web standards-based computing. The Internet is one of the most important forces shaping our ERP solution. As a platform for integration, the Internet has excellent potential because access is broadly available and Internet-based technologies are based on open standards. Our technology partner built our ASP version software from the start to use standard Cold Fusion application servers, secure Web servers, HTTP, Java, and XML.

Uniformity and Consistency

The Solution -

Although ERP projects are complex and expensive, properly implemented, it does offer significant benefits, increased scalability and long term decreased cost and increased speed. When you realize how much is involved with it, you quickly realize that it is really the software and more importantly the business process it describes--not the computing -- that lies at the real heart of this concept.

The Results -

Our implementation has been achieved in three phases with one yet remaining. Divisions were brought online one at a time in order to minimize the business impact on users, customers and employees. We immediately realized several benefits, including but not limited to:

- Easier service ordering for clients.
- Better search capabilities for passive candidates and specific skills.
- Dramatic increase in online candidate responding to openings.
- Enhanced reporting capabilities
- Abilities to offer predictive marketing and develop pools of qualified prospects exclusively for a clients future needs.
- Few incidents of out-dated data being used.
- Better continuity company wide

Comprehensive Search ERP Components

Account development automation (ADA)

Augments the performance of account representatives by automating the process of collecting, qualifying, and organizing requisitions and prospects. ADA modules helps handle regular tasks such as contact management and interview scheduling.

Applicant tracking system (ATS)

Replacing our static contact management system with a dynamic web based module to provide instant job postings, resume submissions and ability for candidates and contractors to modify their account.

Customer relationship management (CRM)

Collects and organizes customer data gathered from a variety of sources, such as trade shows, e-mail, newsletters, and direct contact with the sales force. CRM software provides a comprehensive view of customer data and behavior so companies can apply resources more effectively and derive more revenue from customer relationships. (Q2 2002)

Expense, time and activity management (ETA360)

Streamlines the payroll, expense reimbursements and workforce optimization for field representatives in our distributed workforce via a custom ASP web portal. The system automatically implements corporate policy as well as collecting quantitative data used in performance measurement. (Q2 2002)

Business Intelligence / Knowledge Management

Organizes ordinarily disparate data so that it can be analyzed in a way that provides new insights into existing operations and shines light on new business.

Human resource management (HRM)

Improves the efficiency of corporate and client HR operations by handling the compliance, authorization, reviews, and changes of employees, benefits and services. It helps corporate managers act quickly with better access to real-time data (Q3 2002)