

MOVING INTO THE FAST LANE

Business Process Integration Prepares Blazer Industries for Growth



BLAZING THE MODULAR TRAIL. Buildings built by Blazer, such as this Portland, Ore. Starbucks, are constantly recognized by Blazer customers and dealers, as well as peers and competitors, for their consistent high quality and attention to detail.

SINCE MANUFACTURING ITS FIRST BUILDING IN 1976, BLAZER INDUSTRIES has grown to become the largest producer of commercial modular space in the northwestern United States. And for more than two decades, the company's combination of customized accounting software and manual processes was a reliable vehicle for managing its manufacturing business. But Blazer's system started to sputter when its accounting software vendor began phasing-out support. The company was forced to add programs and paper-based systems to keep its major business processes going, while cutting corners with less important processes. It soon became time for Blazer to trade in its old Chevy for a new Corvette.

A ROUGH ROAD TO TRAVEL

In the 1980s, the family-owned business purchased an ac-

counting software package from Bidtek. It was customized to handle Blazer's estimating, invoicing, and inventory processes. Controller Kelly Hays says that program, combined with paper-based systems for handling purchase orders, monitoring job records, and other processes, worked for the company like a trusty old car: "It ran. The people who needed to drive the car knew how to drive it. It wasn't very fast, but it was reliable."

Then, in the early 2000s, several circumstances combined to make the car start breaking down.

Bidtek, which changed its name to Viewpoint Construction Software in 2003, threw the first wrench into the system when it announced it was switching from a Unix platform to a Windows-based system. As a result, it began phasing-out support for Blazer's programs, starting with the estimating software. To fill the void, Blazer picked up Sage Software's Timberline estimating program. This

MOVING INTO THE FAST LANE

Business Process Integration Prepares Blazer Industries for Growth

meant the company had to manage separate systems and a handful of manual processes.

Then Bidtek started dropping support for Blazer's other custom programs – forcing it to expand the number of handwritten documents and Excel® spreadsheets from a handful to carload. Suddenly, driving that trusty old car was much more difficult.

"Because Bidtek disconnected us from our special custom programs, the disconnection between inventory and estimating and purchasing started to become a real problem," Hays says. "We used Excel to try to manually keep track of allocations for inventory, for example, or whether we had certain items posted to certain jobs, or how much jobs cost us, and whether we made any money."

It was a rough road for Blazer to travel. The company had no inventory or materials tracking systems, which made it difficult to identify outstanding purchase orders (PO). Bills of materials were not available when quoting jobs. There were piles of paper, lots of copying, and employees had to pull printouts from filing cabinets whenever they wanted to look up information.

Despite it all, Hays says Blazer might have stuck with its old car – if the company hadn't

been growing at the same time. When Blazer had 40 employees, a handful of "power users" made short work of the manual processes and software systems, even though they lacked any sort of network. But then business expanded and employee ranks grew to 150. There was much more data to manage and many new employees – who didn't know how to drive Blazer's system – trying to manage it. Many of them used the system less like a car and more like a Conestoga wagon, Hays says.

To keep the business moving at its usual pace, Blazer started cutting corners.

"We just learned to accept the fact that we couldn't do certain things, like worrying about whether or not we tracked how much stuff went into a job," Hays says. "We didn't process things by inventory part number. When we got a bill, if it was within some reasonable amount, we just wrote a check for that amount of money."

Finally, in 2006, enough was enough. Management knew it needed a better system to run the business. Plus, Bidtek was preparing to eliminate all support for its Unix system. So Hays, Engineering Manager Rock Shetler, and several members of the management and IT teams, started shopping for a business software system.

CLIENT PROFILE

COMPANY

Blazer Industries

TYPE OF BUSINESS

Manufacturer of commercial modular space

HEADQUARTERS

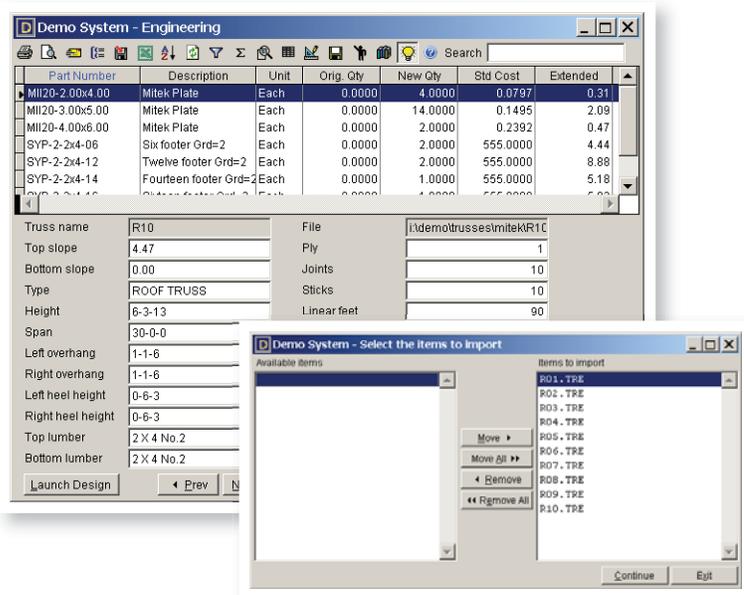
Aumsville, OR

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS

1

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

200



SUCCESS FACTOR. "Deacom said, 'We interface with other programs, and we do it better than anyone else – let us prove it to you,' says Blazer Controller Kelly Hays. "And they did it just exactly the way it needed to be done. I have not been disappointed in any way, shape, or form."

THE RIGHT VEHICLE: INTEGRATED ERP

Blazer was looking for a system that could interface with its Timberline estimating software and its newly purchased labor time-keeping system from Kronos, then connect data throughout the accounting, production, inventory, sales, and purchasing functions. In short, Blazer wanted business software that could manage all its business processes in one, integrated system.

"We wanted a Corvette," Hays says. "We wanted it to do the things that had been disconnected by Bidtek over time, and a lot more. We wanted a system that everyone could access, that could handle everything."

Blazer considered Bidtek's new system, but decided the program "wasn't quite there yet" as a complete business software tool. It looked at a Timberline software package, but the accounting portion didn't meet the company's standards. Epicor was another finalist, as was the DEACOM Integrated Accounting and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Software System from Deacom, Inc.

After much research and a few test drives, Blazer chose the DEACOM System. Several fac-

DEACOM®

MOVING INTO THE FAST LANE

Business Process Integration Prepares Blazer Industries for Growth

tors set DEACOM above the rest. For one, the system is specifically designed to manage every aspect of a modular building manufacturer's business in one system. So there is no need for custom or add-on programs that, as Blazer learned, can add front-end costs for development and back-end costs for support.

The way DEACOM fulfilled Blazer's top search criteria – the integration of estimating, accounting, production, inventory, sales, and purchasing – was another differentiator. In one test, Blazer asked each vendor to address the same purchasing scenario: If Blazer frequently buys lumber from a particular vendor, where in the system could it go to view a menu of other items it could buy from that vendor? DEACOM produced a report of items supplied by vendor from the system's purchasing function. With that, "DEACOM hands-down blew the socks off everyone else," Hays says. "The other guys didn't measure up. Some said, 'That's an outside thing and we can custom program that for you,' but then there was a major price tag."

Deacom's proven experience working with the building industry was another distinguishing factor. In fact, Blazer had looked into DEACOM about a year before starting its software search, Hays says, because it had seen system demonstrations and met Deacom employees at the component industry's major annual event, the Building Component Manufacturers Conference. Then when Blazer asked for a reference, Deacom sent them to one of their truss manufacturing customers. Hays says, "From a function point of view, a truss manufacturer is right up our alley." Like modular and panel manufacturers, truss companies can use links to bring engineering design data into their business software for accurate production, inventory, and cost tracking. "And those guys just gave this glowing report, which moved DEACOM to the top of the short list real fast."

The final factor that helped move the car from the lot was Deacom's focus on creating seamless interfaces to pull data into DEACOM from its customers' other systems. This was an area of concern for Blazer – the company needed to purchase new payroll software to connect to DEACOM, and it already had the Kronos and Timberline programs to link in. Hays says that's what sold it.

"Deacom said, 'We interface with other programs, and we do it better than anyone else – let us prove it to you,' he says. "And they did it just exactly the way it needed to be done. I have not been disappointed in any way, shape, or form."

MOVING INTO THE FAST LANE

Today, about a year into using DEACOM, Blazer is realizing many of the benefits of driving a fully-integrated business software system.

For one, having all the company's information in one place means Blazer can track and access data it had been overlooking when its manual processes became too cumbersome, such as the amount of inventory used per job. Scheduling a job now automatically adjusts inventory levels, with part numbers and costs tracking through to the finished product, shipment, and invoice, so Blazer knows it receives the appropriate payment.

Remote connectivity is another plus of using DEACOM. Because the system runs on a terminal server, there is no need to install software at every employee's workstation. DEACOM is automatically connected to all the computers on Blazer's network, which helps the company move more quickly.

The reporting process is simplified, as well. It's easy for Blazer to sort production, accounting, sales, and other data to create targeted reports quickly through DEACOM's pre-filter forms. DEACOM's use of a Microsoft SQL Server® database is what makes that possible, Hays says. "We can do things with DEACOM that make Excel® look like a dinosaur," he says. "All you have to do is ask. Imagine what you want, and the system will make it happen."

However, Hays explains that Blazer is working through a methodical employee training and buy-in plan of its own design, so the company hasn't eliminated all its manual processes just yet. Blazer knew it would be challenging to get employees who were used to the old system of manual processes and non-networked software to understand and accept any new business software. Therefore, it chose to move at its own careful pace for DEACOM implementation, training, and activation. Blazer went live with the labor tracking and accounting systems first, then started internal training

to gradually increase employees' comfort with DEACOM as it went live with purchasing, sales, and other areas.

"We just started turning things on slowly," Hays says. "We're building on the core building blocks DEACOM has, and we're taking it one layer at a time and trying to be methodical as we build a layer up, so everyone knows just how powerful this tool can be, but not let it get so powerful that we drive the car into a ditch."

So far, they're on the road, and gradually gaining speed. For example, Hays says he struggled to get his purchasing department leader to complete a PO in DEACOM six months ago. But today, that employee has "stopped fighting" the system and continues to get better at using it. Blazer now completes 80 to 85 percent of its POs in DEACOM, as opposed to handwriting all of them.

Blazer plans to continue its slow and steady training process. It will gradually get its employees acclimated to the system, until Blazer is using every aspect of DEACOM and has eliminated all its manual processes. Hays expects that will happen in the next six months to a year.

"We know it works," he says. "We just want to road test it."

After that, Blazer will put the pedal to the floor, ready to take on continued growth and expansion with the help of its ERP system.

ABOUT DEACOM, INC.

Deacom, Inc. produces the complete DEACOM Integrated Accounting and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Software System for lumber dealers and the modular building and building component manufacturing industries.

DEACOM Software manages Engineering Links, Labor Tracking, Stores/Point-of-Sale (POS), Sales Order Entry, Production Scheduling, Purchasing, Inventory Control, and Accounting in a single package. To learn more about the DEACOM System or to schedule a web demonstration, call 610-971-2278 ext. 15 or visit www.deacom.net today.

