

Cafco Construction:

Finding a software solution — Cafco turns to Timberline to work smarter and faster.

Sage Timberline Office

For years Joe Burkett and his finance team at general contractor Cafco Construction had used an outdated accounting package to manage the books. But as the Boston-based firm grew, Burkett saw a corresponding rise in inefficiencies. His team was spending an inordinate amount of time keying accounting data and change orders from Word and Excel files into the accounting package. That's when he knew it was time to change.

"For a long while we operated under the, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it' mode," says Burkett, Cafco's chief financial officer. "But then we got to the point where we were entering the same data two and three times. As technology became more prevalent, we knew we had to find a better mousetrap."

Burkett had already met with Eric Goldstein of United Solutions, New England's leading provider of software for real estate and construction companies. While he was eager to move forward, Burkett first wanted to bring a new controller on board. During another meeting with Goldstein, Burkett mentioned that he had started to look for a controller. In the full spirit of service, Goldstein put on his executive-search hat and recommended that Burkett reach out to a finance executive he knew named Tracy Harrington.

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Burkett hired Harrington. While both were inclined to sign on with United Solutions and Sage Timberline Office, they decided to weigh every option first. Under Harrington's lead, Cafco conducted due diligence on eight software providers, a process that confirmed Burkett's belief.

"After we looked at the different software options, it was obvious that Sage Timberline Office was the right fit for us," he observes.

But Burkett would leave nothing to chance. As a member of the Construction Financial Management Association, he had access to over 140 finance leaders in the construction industry across the state. A large majority of those executives use Sage Timberline Office software, and Burkett reached out to many of them to assess their experience.

"I got very positive feedback," he says. "At that point, the decision became a no-brainer."

Burkett decided to purchase nearly every module – Project Management, Job Cost, Contracts, Accounts Payable/Accounts Receivable, General Ledger, Info Assistant, and Crystal Reports. Under Harrington's lead, the firm worked closely with United Solutions representatives to manage a seamless conversion.

While each module has helped drive efficiency into Cafco's operations, the Project

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Management module has proven most valuable. Under the old operating model, project managers had no way to access information while on the job site. They were left to rely on data pushed to them, at times that were not always convenient. They had to run as many as five separate reports to generate the data needed to create biweekly updates. They also had to create the updates by hand.

Now, project managers can pull whatever data they need, whenever they need it. They can review the data live and use it to create their reports online. They can do it on the computers at their desk, on the job site or at home.

“With Project Management, we have eliminated the need to print, collate, scan and copy data,” Burkett says. “Our project managers can do their report updates whenever they are ready, and there is no pile of paper. We created a more reliable reporting process while knocking several hours out of the process.”

Those hours add up. Every two weeks Cafco managers generate about 25 reports – 12 or so for active projects and a like number that track late payables or receivables from completed jobs.

Burkett also lauds the support he has received from United Solutions, in particular from technical consultant Michael Kane. Early on, Burkett described to Kane his interest in creating a single report that pulls data from multiple modules to give a full overview of a project.

“Michael is the king of customization,” Burkett remarks. “The report he created gives us a real time snapshot of both accrual and cash basis for each project. Now, in twenty seconds Tracy, I and our project managers can review the project status and

get a high level of confidence on the macro level. We also have the ability to drill down when we have questions to spot anything that doesn’t look right.”

Cafco is a niche contractor focused primarily on hotels, restaurants, nightclubs and high-end residential properties. Among their hallmark projects are the food court at the Boston Museum of Science, the dining hall at Babson College, as well as renowned restaurants such as L’Espalier, Scampo, Alta Strada @ MGM, Jillian’s, Olives, Stephanie’s on Newbury and Sibling Rivalry. In 2007, the firm was named the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce Small Business of the Year, an honor earned partly through their innovative use of software.

“We have been able to maximize the return on our investment by minimizing the hours our staff and field personnel spend touching the same information that we used to touch two or three times,” Burkett comments. “We’re continuing to refine what we do, how we do it, and how long it takes. In the end, this allows us to spend more time where it matters most — servicing our clients.”

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– Joe Burkett, CFO,
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CORPORATE PROFILE

Headquarters: Boston, MA
Type of Business: Construction management and general contracting firm.
Website: cafcoconstruction.com
Software: Sage Timberline Office Accounting, Project Management, Job Cost, Payroll, Reporting & Inquiry Suite, Crystal Reports, Document Management, MyAssistant

CHALLENGE	SOLUTION	RESULTS
Replace outdated software to better manage growth.	The full line of Sage Timberline Office software.	Cafco has achieved higher levels of efficiency across its daily operating processes. The greatest gains have come in project management, where managers are using the software to work smarter and faster.