



General Contractor Automates Tasks with Productivity and Collaboration Tools

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Construction

Customer Profile

Brasfield & Gorrie is a U.S.\$2 billion general contracting business based in Birmingham, Alabama. The firm employs 3,000 people and manages projects throughout the southeastern United States.

Business Situation

Brasfield & Gorrie needed more powerful productivity tools for knowledge workers and a more efficient approach to yearly budgeting and registering students for internal training.

Solution

The company deployed the 2007 Microsoft® Office system, including Microsoft Office SharePoint® Server 2007, and developed a budget dashboard and portals.

Benefits

- Presentations done 25 percent faster
- 10 percent weekly saved in IT involvement in intranet
- Yearly budgeting time cut by 15 percent for managers, 50 percent for treasurer
- 50 steps saved for class-registration administrator

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James Purcell, Chief Technology Officer, Brasfield & Gorrie

Brasfield & Gorrie has become a leading general contractor in the southeastern United States by hiring some of the best and brightest and making the most of their talents. In this spirit, IT executives wanted to provide employees a way to create more compelling customer presentations and work more productively in general. The company therefore deployed the 2007 Microsoft® Office system, including Office SharePoint® Server 2007. As a result, employees are creating complex spreadsheets with ease, designing customer presentations 25 percent faster, and working more efficiently overall. In addition, the company reduced the time spent on intranet maintenance by 10 percent for one IT professional, and reduced the time spent on budgeting by 15 percent for managers and by 50 percent for the company treasurer. It also implemented a simpler registration process for internal training.



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Situation

Founded in 1963 and headquartered in Birmingham, Alabama, Brasfield & Gorrie is a top-ranked general contractor with an annual construction volume of more than U.S.\$2 billion. From its offices across the southeastern United States, the company provides contracting and construction management services to customers in 16 states, with a focus on commercial, institutional, health-care, industrial, and water and wastewater projects. In 2006, Brasfield & Gorrie was named among the *Engineering News-Record's* top 25 general contractors nationwide in six different categories, one of *Forbes's* top 500 private companies, and one of *Retail Traffic's* top 50 retail contractors.

Typical of its industry, Brasfield & Gorrie needs powerful and highly functional software tools for productivity, communication, and collaboration. Recently, the need for such tools became especially acute among the company's division managers and project managers. “In addition to their other responsibilities, division managers and some project managers are responsible for generating new business—in effect, acting as the company's marketing and sales force,” explains James Purcell, Chief Technology Officer, Brasfield & Gorrie. “We needed ways to help them create more compelling presentations.”

The company also needed a more efficient approach to budgeting. As Purcell describes, each year managers from 25 separate operating divisions and 18 departments submit their budgets to the company treasurer in a process that in the past required the managers to copy data from divisional spreadsheets and paste it into company spreadsheets. “This was a kind of round-robin process that required one or two people to work full-time for two to four weeks just to manage the final merging,” he explains. “Even then, the company treasurer had to work long hours nearly every day for a

12-week period, just to be sure the numbers were properly merged and aligned.”

Another process that cried out for greater automation was registration for internal training. For employees at Brasfield & Gorrie's six offices, the company offers more than 200 internal training classes per quarter on topics such as contract estimating, equipment operation, safety standards, and the use of Microsoft® Office programs. “To register participants in a given class, instructors used e-mail and manually updated spreadsheets to track who had signed up, who had requested a different class, who had canceled, and so on,” Purcell points out. “The process was slow, cumbersome, and inaccurate for everyone involved.”

Solution

In considering ways to address these challenges, Purcell and his colleagues looked more closely at the 2007 Microsoft Office system, including Office SharePoint® Server 2007, and liked what they saw. “We were intrigued by the improved usability of the tools throughout the 2007 Office system, especially the enhanced formatting capabilities of Excel® 2007 and PowerPoint® 2007,” he says. “We also liked the flexibility provided by Excel Services, the powerful SharePoint Server 2007 libraries for publishing templates and official documents, that product's out-of-the-box workflow capabilities, and its security enhancements. Topping it off was the close integration of SharePoint Server 2007 with Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and Outlook® 2007.”

In late 2007, Purcell and his colleagues deployed Microsoft Office Professional Plus 2007 to all 1,000 desktop employees in a process undertaken with the help of long-time partner ACP, Inc., also based in Birmingham. This deployment, completed over the course of two months, consisted of consolidating several versions of Microsoft

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Office software to the 2007 Office release and moving from Microsoft Office SharePoint Portal Server 2003 to Office SharePoint Server 2007. As part of this migration, a large number of team sites were deployed smoothly. Brasfield & Gorrie also had the confidence of knowing that in the event of any deployment hurdles, ACP had the expertise needed to anticipate challenges and respond accordingly.

According to Lola Flippo, Practice Director of Business Solutions at ACP, Brasfield & Gorrie decided to use Microsoft Systems Management Server 2003 for the deployment due to the complex nature of the business, which spans six corporate offices and 150 separate job sites across the United States.

The deployment also included the use of Excel Services in Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 to migrate budget data into an executive dashboard. Excel Services makes it possible for workbooks created in Office Excel 2007 spreadsheet software to be used as interactive reports throughout the enterprise.

Benefits

With the deployment of the 2007 Office system, Brasfield & Gorrie is enjoying an environment in which employees can create sizable spreadsheets, striking presentations, and other complex documents with efficiency and ease. The company also is enjoying a highly automated approach to budgeting and class registration, and in the future will use Office Professional Plus 2007 and Office SharePoint Server 2007 to launch an internal knowledge base.

Taking Advantage of New Graphics Capabilities

For Purcell and his colleagues, the enhanced usability features of Office Excel 2007 and other programs in Office Professional Plus 2007 are making an impact throughout the

enterprise, particularly for financial experts. “With more than 672 accountants, estimators, and other such professionals on staff, Brasfield & Gorrie depends on having powerful, flexible, and highly usable tools for number crunching,” Purcell says. “This is what makes the new features in Excel 2007 such a vital part of our financial professionals’ day-to-day experience.”

As Purcell describes it, users love the new Tables feature, with its integrated auto-filtering and sorting, automatic expansion and reformatting, and automatic adjustments of charts and other objects. They also like the 3-D pie charts with drop shadow, enhanced bar charts, and support for unlimited columns in both directions. “A dozen senior accountants came back from a Software Assurance class on Excel 2007 and were just raving about how much easier it is to do graphing and filtering, tasks they perform frequently,” he says. Microsoft Software Assurance is a maintenance offering that helps businesses deploy, manage, and migrate software by offering support, partner services, training, and IT tools.

Office Excel users, along with users of other programs in Office Professional Plus 2007, such as Word 2007, the PowerPoint 2007 presentation graphics program, and the InfoPath® 2007 information-gathering program, are making extensive use of the SmartArt™ enhanced graphics capabilities. As Purcell explains, SmartArt is a particular favorite of senior division managers and project managers at Brasfield & Gorrie in their marketing and sales capacity. “Our managers do a lot of PowerPoint presentations, which they are completing about 25 percent faster than before thanks to the SmartArt feature as well as the Office Fluent™ user interface,” he says. “Considering that these individuals have to perform multiple tasks, being able to create presentations that much faster is a huge advantage.”

Using Features “They Were Not Even Aware Of”

According to Rickey Whitworth, IT Infrastructure Manager, it’s not just financial and marketing professionals who are working smarter with these new capabilities—it’s virtually everyone at Brasfield & Gorrie. “Users tell me they found the Fluent user interface easy to learn and handy for helping them to perform complex tasks of all kinds,” he says. “With the Ribbon, people are working more efficiently and more creatively, using features they were not even aware of in the past, such as live preview of formatting changes. They love that.”

At the IT level, professionals are taking advantage not only of the enhanced usability of the 2007 Office release, but also of the enhanced security capabilities, particularly in Office SharePoint Server 2007. “Thanks to the powerful capabilities surrounding authentication, encryption, access mapping, and information rights management, there is less need for IT involvement in the day-to-day running of the company’s intranet,” explains

Jamie White, Systems Engineer, Brasfield & Gorrie. “As a result, we have freed up four hours weekly for one senior developer, and this is time that he was able to devote to helping the company deploy a new enterprise resource planning solution. As a result, we were able to bring on the new solution sooner than we would have otherwise.”

Automating Budgeting and Class Registration

According to Purcell, the executive dashboard based on Excel Services is making life a lot easier for the several dozen Brasfield & Gorrie managers and others who are responsible for developing the company’s yearly budget. This dashboard, a secure portal that was developed in just three weeks, provides a check-in/check-out system for transparently updating and integrating data from divisional spreadsheets and merging that data into a master spreadsheet. With the help of protected cells, the master spreadsheet pulls and consolidates data from 50 different spreadsheets, providing the company treasurer a painless and seamless way of monitoring the budgeting process.

Figure 1. The new portal dashboard at Brasfield & Gorrie delivers budgetary information pulled from Excel Services into Office SharePoint Server 2007.



Purcell says that the dashboard has proved to be a resounding success. “The spreadsheet merging that used to require one or two people to work for two to four weeks is done automatically,” he reports. “The dozens of division managers who use the portal are reducing the time they have to spend on budgeting by 15 percent, and the company treasurer has cut her time on this process by half. At least two division managers have told me they were surprised at how easy they found the new solution to use, and how much easier the overall process was than before.”

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For more information about Brasfield & Gorrie, visit the Web site at: www.brasfieldgorrie.com

For more information about ACP, Inc., visit the Web site at: www.acp-inc.com

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