

A Walk in the Cloud



Clark Builders implements Computer Guidance Corporation's hosted ERP solution in order to help manage exponential growth

Recently, Computer Guidance Corporation* sat down with Dean Doige, CIO of Clark Builders, to talk about his company's substantial growth and how CGC's enterprise resource planning solution has the subsidiary of Turner Construction poised for even greater success.

Edmonton-based Clark Builders is a general building contractor providing commercial, industrial, institutional, recreational and residential construction services. The organization has experienced a substantial — approximately 45% — growth, reaching \$850M in annual revenue, and is a five-year recipient of Best Employers in Canada and Canada's Best Managed Companies awards.

To help manage this substantial growth and support future expansion, Clark Builders implemented Computer Guidance Corporation's cloud-based, hosted ERP solution, including core financial management applications, job costing, time/material billing, Canadian payroll, HR, purchasing, and project collaborator, all of which is supported by business intelligence and analytics, and enterprise content management productivity tools. The company went live on October 28, 2013 following a very short and successful implementation.

Q What drove your decision to upgrade Clark Builders' legacy accounting software to a fully integrated enterprise-class ERP solution?

A: Clark Builders needed a solid platform to support our rapidly growing business. In our industry, in order to support our exponential growth in such a short period of time we needed rock solid software that delivered true integration between the financial and project sides of the business along with advanced financial reporting.

We needed information and the ability to act on it, but we didn't want to take on the huge opportunity cost usually required for

such an undertaking. The executives of our organization wanted to avoid pulling critical resources out of our company for ERP because of the negative impact that would leave on the business. Clark Builders is in extreme growth mode and any deviation from our current course of business would likely have cost us tens of millions of dollars from construction projects.

Q So, you knew you needed ERP to support the growth, but were you worried about how the employees, partners and end users would be impacted by change?

A: From the onset, Clark Builders wanted to keep things simple from the user perspective. We wanted a software solution that would be simpler and less time- and resource-consuming to implement than a large, monolithic ERP solution. We looked at several packages from across the market, but most of them required too much in terms of resources, expertise, time, money and effort — and we had a business to run!

Computer Guidance provided a solution where the training was simple and the processes would remain the same, just automated, accurate and accessible, without a massive amount of customization and process re-engineering. They also delivered a richer UI, rather than another green screen application, that could be utilized in the field, and an advanced and integrated payroll and financial reporting system allowing for better forecasting.

Q It sounds like you shopped around before making your decision. What were the key differentiators that set Computer Guidance Corporation's ERP solution apart from the competition?

A: Our due diligence process was intense, but it had to be. Clark Builders had too much at stake to take any chances. We chose CGC because they met our needs from the ground up. We found that they were well prepared to

provide an upgrade path with little resistance, they could keep things simple for our end user community, and that they would mitigate risk to data conversion, ensuring that our entire history and database would be migrated successfully.

To be frank, CGC would ensure Clark Builders' business goals were met. Their cloud-based ERP solution had a good engine and the software ran on a stable platform. We were confident they could support our growth and scale.

Q So, it was important for Clark Builders to have a solid relationship with its solution provider. Can you elaborate on that?

A: One word...HUGE. It had to be a partnership and that's the bottom line. I have seen scenarios where the information systems provider becomes overwhelmed and becomes a punching bag and cannot perform. I have also seen situations where companies outsource the implementation. Computer Guidance Corporation became part of Clark Builders' DNA, and that was critical to our success.

Q What were some of the key features and functions critical to supporting Clark Builders?

A: First off, it was important for our organization to have a hosted, cloud-based solution to avoid the need for internal "IBM System i" experts yet still be able to take advantage of the superb technology platform. CGC would help us get out of the data center business. They would help us get out of the hardware and OS business. And, they would help us simplify our service catalog. In the end, we were able to reallocate Clark Builders' resources back on our core business and drive more growth and revenue as we climb toward our aggressive corporate objectives.

Just as important as the technological advantages, Computer Guidance Corporation

also offered important financial advantages. They had a package specific to Canadian payroll and a great A/P application to meet our demands for streamlined processing for getting paid and making payments.

Taking things a step further, their enterprise content management supported the ability for mass uploads, imaging and greater workflow efficiency. And, sophisticated reporting and forecasting abilities built upon a foundation of integrated financial and project data would give us an unprecedented ability to make critical decisions and take action, making sure high quality Clark Builders' projects are done on time and on budget.

Q Now that you have implemented Computer Guidance Corporation's ERP solution, how would you describe the benefits to Clark Builders?

A: Today, just four months after our "go live" date, we've seen significant improvements and we haven't even implemented all of the applications or capabilities of the system. For example, we've experienced tremendous savings with data entry for A/P and Payroll due to the automation of fundamental business processes with an improved UI and browser-based solution availability in both the office and the field.

In addition, we've reallocated "IBM System" IT resources to other functional areas of Clark Builders as a result of going to a hosted, cloud-based solution from CGC. And, because our External Purchasing (PO) system is integrated with eCMS, a massive data entry point has been reduced. Project managers can see committed costs quicker, on demand.

Thanks to CGC, we're validating instead of entering. One specific example of this is our automated timesheets from the field. Not only have we reduced another data entry point, we've added 40% more staff and added no more resources to administration. We process more payroll with the same staff. That's impressive.

Q What do you think contributed to the success of your ERP implementation and why?

A: The "secret sauce" for Clark Builders was the approach we took to the project. We had a dedicated team as well as executive sponsorship. We took ownership of the project and drove it from the top down and then across the enterprise thanks to a collaborative mindset. We utilized a war room style concept to centralize decisions, information, actions and activities in one place and had CGC



business consultants function as an integral part of the implementation team. We also used a phased approach, bringing on users and processes in sections rather than a "big bang" approach.

Q Obviously, Clark Builders has it "nailed." But for the rest of the industry, how important do you believe it is for construction companies to have the mobility and accessibility provided by web-based solutions such as Computer Guidance Corporation's eCMS ERP?

A: Phrases like "mobility," "the cloud," "browser-based," or "integrated ERP" are not just buzz words, but are fundamental technologies that are required in order to scale quickly, in order to be less IT-driven, and in order to run a more efficient and productive construction business.

A solution like eCMS ERP from Computer Guidance Corporation is critical. Clark Builders now provides a central data center, and all applications connect to that. This way we have to maintain and manage only one key center and the data is housed by one system in one area. It is secure and compliant, and everything connects simply and seamlessly to this central hub.

Q What recommendations would you offer to other contractors as they look to select an ERP solution?

A: If a company is considering making the move to ERP, they really need to ask themselves "why?", "what are we trying to accomplish?", "what is the value proposition?" Clark Builders completed an entire RFP process and examined the potential value of the move. Does it meet the financial goals and business objectives of the company to move to the next level?

Companies also need to determine the scope of their ERP project. In other words, what are they trying to accomplish and what is the best method to go about it? What are the functional needs and what would the implementation look like? Can executive commitment be secured and can the project's goals be clearly communicated and supported from the top down? What are the estimated budget, timeline and resources for the project from planning to training and beyond?

Create a must-have functionality list, prioritize projects and select a solution provider that can deliver. Then, implement with a phased approach, having the users experience the "new norm" before going live, and lean on the business analysts for critical expertise. The end justifies the means; just be smart on how you get there.

Q What's next for Clark Builders when it comes to bringing additional technology solutions into the organization?

A: We've already implemented the core financial applications of eCMS, so now it's time to add more business intelligence and enterprise content management functionality. In 2014, Clark Builders plans to extend our data pull with more business intelligence, enterprise content management and will tie all of this together for not only our A/P, job cost management and payroll processes, but other critical business processes as well.

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*As of January 31, 2014, Computer Guidance Corporation became part of Explorer Software Group but will continue to function as a separate entity.