



Building on Decades of ERP Experience, Parsons Electric Pushes Forward with eCMS v.4.0

An *Engineering News-Record* Top 600 Contractor, Parsons Electric has grown steadily since its inception in 1927 to become one of North America's premier electrical and technology contractors. Today, Parsons continues to deliver unparalleled service to its customers through three service divisions — Electrical Construction, Electrical Service and Technologies.

Parsons Electric has 6 offices located across Minnesota, Arizona and North Dakota, and has leveraged an expansive technology infrastructure to streamline its day-to-day business operations. Jeff Moryn, CIO, Parsons Electric, sat down with us recently to provide some insight on the company's utilization of enterprise resource planning solutions to drive efficiency and maximize productivity.

Why did Parsons make the move and upgrade to eCMS v.4.0?

We've been a Computer Guidance Corporation customer since 1996 and have enjoyed tremendous benefits using their system over the past two decades. As our business has changed, their ERP has allowed us to continue to adapt and succeed, so the decision to upgrade to eCMS v.4.0 ERP last June was a simple one.

Currently, we leverage almost 20 different applications from Computer Guidance, including core financials, payroll, human resources (and HR self-service), purchasing, time-and-material billing, mobile eCMS, and more. With all that going on, we believed that eCMS v.4.0 would only enhance our business intelligence and data mining experience. And, that belief was confirmed following our implementation and rollout of Phase I of Cognos...we've seen the power.

Can you elaborate on Cognos? What pushes this solution over the top?

Believe it or not, Cognos Business Intelligence and Analytics integration with eCMS was the deciding factor behind our upgrade to eCMS v.4.0. The reporting that Cognos offers is unlike anything we've seen across the industry, and the security and BI are unparalleled. We were also able to develop a solid deployment strategy in conjunction with Computer Guidance to ensure our next 18 years would be as productive with their solution as our past 18 years have been.

What features and functions of eCMS v.4.0 are you most excited about?

Before we get into specific feature sets, I want to tell you how pleased Parsons is with the strategy supporting Computer Guidance Corporation's

ERP development. From my perspective, they appear to be extremely focused, and rightfully so, on data and information management and distribution. The Computer Guidance Corporation strategy is best of breed and provides organizations like ours with the ability to serve up data to all users in the format they need it, when and where they need it.

On top of that and aside from Cognos Business Intelligence, Parsons is looking forward to utilizing Project Collaborator, Mobile eCMS and Human Resources Self Service. We have just finished the final testing of HRSS and developed our deployment strategy. I cannot wait until every employee is on HRSS — it is such an intuitive and easy-to-use application, but will undoubtedly deliver enormous productivity gains and heighten employee satisfaction. Following that launch, we can't wait to unleash Mobile eCMS and Project Collaborator.

Parsons' deployment stayed on premise rather than in the cloud. Can you tell us why?

Quite simply, we were already comfortable with things as they are. For us, the system takes no maintenance and we have an easy back-up solution. The IBM platform is so reliable and stable that there is really nothing that you need to do...it just runs and runs. When

it comes to upgrades, Parsons partners with Computer Guidance and the maintenance is easily justifiable in return for their assurance that my updates are done in a timely and thorough manner.

And, frankly, Parsons was not ready to give up control and go to the cloud. Although, technically I keep telling our team that we are essentially using a cloud solution, just not the traditional cloud. Parsons' remote satellite offices use the system that resides in our MN headquarters, so they are in a cloud-based environment. When using eCMS, we host the ERP, not a third party.

Let's circle back on ERP mobile and self-service applications. What do they mean for Parsons and other construction companies?

Combine the pace at which information is collected and needs to be disseminated with on-the-move employees and there is no question that this is where technology is headed. Just like our personal needs are fulfilled with apps on our smart phones, we need innovative solutions for our diverse business needs. Today, we have punch list, remote payroll, and a growing list of other construction apps so it is easy to justify giving employees mobile devices and the infrastructure to support them.

There is no question that Parsons will continue to push the limits of mobility and self service similar to our work with ECM imaging and workflow. For Parsons, it's about more than just accounting, and that is where we are headed with Computer Guidance Corporation. We are pushing this workflow into project management and field operations, and will also roll out Project Collaborator as a major component in our overall ECM strategy.

Can you comment on the importance of data, and its accessibility and distribution?

Until it is presented in a cognitive manner, data is just data. Parsons needs information to continue to achieve such high levels of success. We need to get it into the system quickly and accurately. Computer Guidance Corporation's eCMS provides terrific support for data entry and capture, and then serves it up to our users across the enterprise so they can act upon that information. In the office and the field, Parsons relies on eCMS as well as mobile, self-service and BI apps to make mission-critical decisions and keep projects moving forward on time and on budget. Computer Guidance Corporation's strategy continues to be data-centric and we agree that this is the most important role that an ERP can fulfill.

For example, traditionally, contractors and sub-contractors have had to enter data multiple times, in multiple ways, and in multiple systems to meet compliances and requirements. These data entry requirements can include submitting bills, running certified reports, submitting taxes and more. Even though the systems they work in are online, they are all different and often require manual processes unless you have an ERP that can constantly serve up the information and format it in a customized fashion that can be just uploaded or imported.

That's where eCMS comes in, delivering the flexibility we need to get data in and out of different systems just as Parsons requires for each specific task. Better still, eCMS also allows for easy integration with third-party solutions.

How would you recommend other contractors conduct their ERP selection?

An ERP system is critical for any construction company. And, while there are a handful of choices on the market, I'd choose a mature product and then get involved heavily. Each company needs to get to know its ERP intimately. Get in-depth training, facilitate interaction between users...the more you invest in your ERP, the more you will ultimately get out of it.

Make sure the solution can scale with your business. And, it's more than just my opinion; it's two decades of proof that demonstrate that Computer Guidance Corporation eCMS can keep pace with any construction business need or goal. They've stood behind their ERP since 1996 and provided world-class support along the way. They are there when we need them and we know how to get support for current initiatives and collaborate on plans for the future as well.

eCMS is also highly customizable, which is another critical trait for an ERP system. Whether it's the intricacies of union labor, expansive materials and resource management, or complex payroll activities, no solution rises to the occasion like eCMS.

What wisdom can you share regarding ERP implementation?

Simple: get a test environment. Whether it's the entire system itself or just an upgrade or new module,

test then rollout. This is a process that Parsons has gone through with Computer Guidance Corporation for each and every modification we've made. We know the business benefits will be there, but we want the users to get used to the system and its new functionality before we go live. But don't wait too long or fall too far behind or the releases will add up and upgrades can become more complicated than they were ever intended to be. Take the upgrades and updates and make the incremental changes as they come. Change is good.

What have you gained with eCMS v.4.0?

First and foremost we have eliminated our entire manual process for printing payroll stubs and checks. We don't have to do it anymore. Right behind that significant savings is our ability to leverage the reporting from Cognos to run a more efficient operation — including Phase I recreated reports, committed costs, job wrap data, and construction manager reports. Everything is accessible and easily readable, with simple drill-downs, filters and navigation. Parsons data is available to all our users and can be exported into virtually any other system.

In addition, eForms make changing and customizing checks a breeze, and the distribution of eForms is great. Our productivity is up thanks to Soft Labels and Lookup Tables that are customizable for users. The new look-and-feel, browser-based solution and its navigation bring value to office workers and field personnel alike. Even part-time Parsons staff members are more efficient and are integrated with all parts of our business.

What future benefits do you anticipate?

We will continue to gain enhancements and efficiencies with eForms and are looking forward to implementing Project Collaborator (Computer Guidance Corporation's project management and collaboration application). Also on our horizon is the full and formal roll out of Mobile eCMS for remote time entry, field labor reporting and more. All of these activities will bring tremendous benefits to Parsons and keep us well positioned at the forefront of our industry. ■■■

