HOW AURORA TRI-STATE MAKES PROGRESS

SUPPORTING BUSINESS GROWTH AND MARKET CHANGE WITH SI SYSTEMS AND PROGRESS

Since 1953, Aurora Tri-State Fire Protection has specialized in providing fire protection to the Chicago business community, including sprinkler inspections, extinguishers, services and ongoing maintenance. Over the past ten years, the organization has expanded its product lines to include security, Alarms, CCTV, Card Access, and Door Entry Systems. With only fifty employees supporting the nine million dollar business, it is imperative that the company's operations are streamlined to ensure maximum productivity and efficiency.

Aurora Tri-State Fire Protection is using the SI Fire System, developed by Progress Application Partner SI Systems, to support virtually all areas of the business, including service orders, preventative maintenance, scheduling and billing, inventory management, job costing, purchasing, accounts receivable and payable and financial management. Since implementing the Progress®

CHALLENGE

Improve poor productivity and customer service levels resulting from numerous disparate IT systems and manual business processes

SOLUTION

Standardize on one system supporting virtually all areas of the business: the SI Fire System, developed by Progress Application Partner SI Systems

BENEFIT

Improved productivity, increased profitability, streamlined operations, realized significant cost savings and improved customer service

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BUSINESS MAKING PROGRESS

OpenEdge®-based system, Aurora Tri-State has achieved significant benefits to its business, including improved productivity, increased profitability, streamlined operations, significant cost savings, and improved customer service.

OPTIMIZING BUSINESS OPERATIONS AND IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE

Today, Aurora Tri-State runs like a well-oiled machine. But according to Cathy Costello, the company's CFO, that was not the case prior to using the SI Fire System. "Previously we had multiple disparate systems that did not effectively communicate with each other. It was very bad for business and for customer service."

Most of the company's processes were managed manually, requiring employees to spend countless hours on tedious and mundane tasks and increasing the possibility for errors. "In the fire, life and safety business we can't afford to make any mistakes. We have to be on top of everything—businesses and lives depend on it."

Costello, who also operates as Aurora Tri-State's entire IT department, had very specific requirements in mind. "We needed a solution that was unique to our industry, very flexible, and one that serviced the majority of our business without customization. It was also important that I have the ability to get to the data myself rather than paying the vendor every time I need to look at something. I wanted a product that would give me access to rich business knowledge through data mining and provide reports internally to help run the organization. Lastly, it was imperative that our new solution offer multiple interface options to meet the needs of the different types of users within our organization."

SI SYSTEMS AND PROGRESS: BUSINESS KNOWLEDGE AND STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGY

After looking at numerous products on the market, Costello's decision came down to two solutions: the SI Systems application and a solution from a local vendor. "SI Systems is always there for us and gives us the support

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Cathy Costello
Chief Financial Officer
Aurora Tri-State Fire Protection

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we need. They understand the unique challenges of our industry, address all of our concerns, and they were very responsive and agreeable to any of our requests. Also, the fact that SI Systems offers multiple interface options was a significant factor in our decision to choose the SI Fire System. Like many executives, the owners of our company are most comfortable with Windows or Web-based applications that have an attractive and user-friendly interface versus those of us in the back office that want the fast, efficient character-based option. Above all else, what truly compelled me to choose SI over the other vendor was their business knowledge. Unlike most other vendors, anyone you speak to at the company knows their product and the market inside and out."

Aurora Tri-State runs almost its entire business on the SI Fire System. According to Costello, the implementation process was extremely smooth and the learning curve for employees was very short. "We are amazed at the incredible job SI did in converting our data from our previous systems. The accuracy of the conversion was phenomenal. SI really went above and beyond to provide reports and backup for validating the transition."

IMPROVED PRODUCTIVITY AND REDUCED COSTS

Since implementing the SI Fire System and moving from four software packages down to just one, Aurora Tri-State has realized significant benefits to its business. "The fact that we have our customer, service and accounting information all in one database has made a huge impact on our overall productivity," says Costello. "We can better serve our customers by managing their equipment, inspections and billing data. We can run reports and immediately identify if anything critical has been missed, like an inspection. And our back office has become so efficient that we've lessoned that staff by one full-time person."

As a fire, life and safety company, Aurora Tri-State provides monitoring services that are billed quarterly. "Prior to the SI System, that meant us having three or four people in the office typing well over 1000 invoices for monitoring charges," explains Costello. "Once we went on SI, I literally just hit a button. The only time spent now is on stuffing envelopes." The company's accounting process is now fully integrated and automated.

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"I rarely talk about the benefits to our accounting process because that system is just so streamlined; I almost never have to think about it." But, according to Costello, prior to using the SI Fire system, the end of month accounting process was complex, tedious and cumbersome due to the different systems and manual processes. "With SI being fully integrated, every action you take in the system automatically updates the database and everything is tied in with the financials. So when you go to close the month it is pretty painless."

DELIVERING A HIGHER LEVEL OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

With streamlined operations and automated business processes, Aurora Tri-State is able to better serve customers. "It is easy to stay on top of everything and extremely beneficial that everyone in the company has access to the same, real-time information," says Costello. "Today, when a customer calls with a question, anyone in our organization can answer their request— we don't have to pass them off to the multiple divisions—so there is no delay in getting them what they need. That is absolutely a competitive advantage. We look very polished and professional, and we can manage our customers far better than before." The system has also proven to be extremely reliable. "We have never had an issue with the system, no data corruption, no data loss and zero downtime. That is critical because, truly, this system is our security."

MOVING BUSINESS FORWARD WITH INCREASED VISIBILITY AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Costello believes that having multiple interface options has been critical to getting people within the organization to use the SI Fire System. "With the SI system, everyone in our organization has the ability to use the system the way they want to in order to meet their needs, their role, and computer competency level. This functionality has absolutely increased our productivity and had a positive impact on our profitability."

The SI Fire System has also given Costello the reporting flexibility and independence she required. With the ability to perform data mining, she is able to select which data tables and fields to report and can save her query

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definition for repeated use. "This tool has given me the control I wanted so I can access information on demand. The data mining functionality is incredibly powerful; you can quickly and easily sift through vast amounts of data, take your information and dissect it many different ways, and then present reports to upper management that provide an accurate snapshot of the business."

Costello says that the Web interface has made it easy for business users to access reports as well. "At the end of each Web report there is a hyperlink to click to download the information into Excel. So business users such as the owner and president of the company, who is not extremely computer literate, can now go into the tool via the Web, get the data, click, and throw it into Excel. It's wonderful! It is very flexible how you can get to the data. You can even design your own reports. The more data we can get, the quicker we can do things, and the faster we can make business decisions and move forward."

Aurora Tri-State has also found the SI Fire System to be a valuable marketing and sales tool. "We will run reports to identify which customers are using which services and then supply that information to our staff so they can go out and cross-sell different services. Having this kind of visibility across our customer base is a great advantage," says Costello.

OPTIMIZED INVENTORY MANAGEMENT

The SI Fire System has also enabled Aurora Tri-State to improve the inventory management process. "With improved job costing functionality, our install division is much better able to manage our inventory. The system helps that department understand when to pull that inventory for a job, if there are open purchase orders, if we have subcontractors waiting for parts or information, and it also allows us to do billing. Underneath the hood the system tracks everything for you. So we can run reports and know exactly where things stand from a profitability perspective. This level of integration is a tremendous advantage."

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SUPPORTING BUSINESS GROWTH AND MARKET CHANGE

With the SI Fire System, Aurora Tri-State can operate like a multimillion dollar business with a much smaller infrastructure than many companies, explains Costello. "Recently, we sold part of our business and we are growing another. I am able to manage all of this growth and change with a very small group of people because of the functionality and automation of the SI tool. And the SI team is wonderful about working with us to meet our evolving needs. We worked with SI to make a few minor adjustments to their core product in the collections area. Now, in our accounts receivable, we can manage $1.1 to $1.2 million with only one person on staff. It is just phenomenal."

A FUTURE WITH SI SYSTEMS AND PROGRESS SOFTWARE

Costello believes that they have just scratched the surface in regards to what the SI Fire System has to offer. "We want to take greater advantage of the tool. It has so much to offer." In July, the company started using the Web for dispatching. "So now, I can have my technicians pull up their own schedules and print them out at home. We also anticipate using a wireless Internet connection with our laptops to arm our technicians with even more information. This will lessen the call volume immensely."

According to Costello, the company is just now beginning to push the product to help them provide better service. "Customers want their inspection reports right then and there; they want to sign for a work order right then and there. We are just starting to move in this direction. We also expect that our larger customers will soon start using the Web to view their equipment and past inspections."

"The fantastic thing about OpenEdge and the SI Fire System is that they can scale with our growing needs and meet the changing demands of the market and our customers. And with SI Systems we know we have a long-term partner. They have been nothing but professional and highly responsive," concludes Costello.

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SI SYSTEMS

SI Systems is a complete hardware and software solution for the business management needs of commercial sub-contractors. It includes a full line of software applications that can be mixed and matched to fit the customer's specific needs. For more information contact Scott McIntyre at 800-422-2277 or visit: www.si-sys.com.

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Progress Software Corporation (NASDAQ: PRGS) is a global software company that enables enterprises to be operationally responsive to changing conditions and customer interactions as they occur. Our goal is to enable our customers to capitalize on new opportunities, drive greater efficiencies, and reduce risk. Progress offers a comprehensive portfolio of best-in-class infrastructure software spanning event-driven visibility and real-time response, open integration, data access and integration, and application development and management—all supporting on-premises and SaaS/cloud deployments. Progress maximizes the benefits of operational responsiveness while minimizing IT complexity and total cost of ownership.

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