UNIT4 Agresso Case Study

Skookum

Non-profit services contractor Skookum has restored dignity to the disabled and has improved confidence to employers via a fast-growth UNIT4 Agresso ERP solution.

Overview

Skookum, a $25 million non-profit organization, walks the line each day between compassion and competition; competence versus capability. The Seattle-based employment services contractor has earned a reputation for delivering on promises and instilling confidence to employers and employees alike. As their website at www.skookum.org tells it, it's all about "people, pride and performance."

Skookum services both the public and private sector, including the U.S. Army on the hiring side, and disabled veterans badly in need of restoring both their pride and a paycheck. Juggling the needs of a workforce beset with physical, emotional and developmental disabilities, against employers needing jobs done right and on time, Skookum leans heavily on its operational infrastructure. That's where enterprise resource solution provider, UNIT4, brings in the reinforcements.

Supplying financial management, project management and logistics capabilities, the Agresso solution helps Skookum management maintain the agility it needs to meet the changing needs of today, while planning for the organizational rapid-growth plan Skookum has for tomorrow. Like its workforce, Skookum is committed to surpassing expectations: the non-profit organization plans to grow to $100 million over the next 3-5 years, with the lion's share coming from the government contracting sector.

Its partner, UNIT4, is the ERP market's definition of agility and the leader in a new multi-billion-dollar cross-vertical niche that UNIT4 calls "BLINC" – Businesses Living IN Change. These post-millennium organizations, like Skookum, are characterized by almost frenetic levels of dynamic business change – requiring post-installation agility that cannot be accommodated by the perennial ERP solution giants.

Today, Agresso's unique underpinning architecture is being enjoyed by Skookum, as well as thousands of BLINC organizations with over 1,100,000 users worldwide. Agresso is focused on correcting the assumption of technology buyers that they must continually face expensive ERP re-architecting.

Power and flexibility

In 2005, and in need of updating its back-office capabilities, Skookum took a hard look at the ERP software providers geared to growing mid-market, services organizations. Like many smaller organizations on a fast-growth plan to mid-market status, Skookum had outgrown its "start-up" software that was populated with thousands of spreadsheets, a stand-alone database, and home-grown code that was difficult to change and even harder to maintain.

Skookum 'short-listed' four companies for review: UNIT4, Deltek, Microsoft (Solomon) and a fourth that was later deemed too small. Skookum then had a deeper look into the vendors' architectures, feature/functionality and future plans. Skookum also enlisted an IT consultant firm, Soft Resources, to assist with the selection/decision process.

Ultimately, Skookum found both the Microsoft and Deltek solutions too rigid, and like many organizations, had more than a few concerns about the future product direction of Microsoft. Skookum also felt Deltek's orientation towards large federal contractors would make the company feel like "a small fish in a big pond."

EMBRACING **CHANGE**

Agresso was selected in October 2005, and went live just three months later in January 2006 with financial management, project management and logistics for invoicing – despite working around three sets of year-end holiday interruptions.

"I had the usual advanced concerns that are typical when you move from one system to another, but it turns out my concerns were unfounded," said James Golden, Business Systems Director of Skookum. "Typically, one of the most challenging periods is with data entry, but our internal implementation team saw that the Agresso system was far better than what we had from day one. We were able to quickly see that the power and flexibility of the Agresso architecture would allow us to grow and change as often as we desired."

Delivering key business benefits

Fore-armed with the new capability to bid on employment contracts with more accurate and integrated project logistics information – such as the number, type and duration of manpower resources, financial costs, and associated project overhead – Skookum says it has found new avenues to compete, grow revenue and profits.

"Previously there were many finite jobs that we couldn't begin to bid on, or that when we did so, ineffectively," Golden said. "We typically do well from a profitability standpoint with jobs that are continuous, like cleaning. However, jobs that are not continuous, like asbestos removal or highway striping, have finite time and project-oriented parameters. That takes a much more complex set of data integration and analytical and reporting needs – as well as the right business processes to make the contract work.

Golden explains that in the government contracting space, there is the opportunity to compete for Indefinite Quantity Work, as well as contracts for Firm Fixed Pricing. Through the capabilities of the Agresso system, Skookum can direct its growth to both segments – and gain a better profitability margin in the process. Also, Skookum has grown beyond its Seattle surroundings and into multiple divisions and operating companies; some overlapping, some with shared resources, and the firm now has contracts in areas including Kansas, North Carolina, Texas.

"Our business development resources can now track projects that are three months, one year, even two years out," Golden said. "And while we are primarily a government contractor, we are gaining significant work outside of the Department of Defense so that our revenue stream is less cyclical and tied purely to federal initiatives. We have a contract that we are currently bidding on that can increase our revenues by as much as 20 percent - this is growth opportunity that Agresso is both helping to facilitate and that the system's architecture can continue to enfold."

While better business development, profitability and geographic expansion have all been credited at least in part to the Agresso deployment, Golden recalls a recent instance when the Agresso solution also saved an existing contract.

"We faced a difficult situation with the Department of Public Works at Fort Louis in Washington State. Our contract with them was in crisis mode due to inconsistent scheduling and invoicing on our end. With Agresso, we were able to do an integrated matrix of work orders, service schedules and invoice generation that was consistent, accurate and that greatly reduced paperwork on both sides. We had a very short timeframe to completely change the implementation path we were on. Agresso pulled all of the data together, revamped business processes and created reports that everyone was happy with," Golden said.

About UNIT4 Business Software

UNIT4 Business Software is the North American subsidiary of UNIT4, a global business software and services company that creates, provides and supports software for Businesses Living IN Change – delivered via the cloud or on-premise. We offer solutions that help these fast-changing public, private, non-profit and higher education organizations embrace business change – simply, quickly and cost-effectively.

Our Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) suite, UNIT4 Agresso, is ideal for people- and service-centric organizations that face ongoing pressure to respond to change. Agresso users are able to make system changes themselves, without re-implementing or incurring external IT or services costs, benefiting from post-implementation agility, independence and control.

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