Customer Case Study

Blake Real Estate, Inc.

Blake Real Estate Uses Prolog® Software to Eliminate Manual Tasks and Increase Productivity by Up to 800 Percent

Blake Real Estate, Inc. is a full-service real estate development firm with in-house property management, leasing and construction capabilities. Founded more than 50 years ago in Washington, DC, this third generation family-owned company owns and manages a property portfolio of nearly a dozen commercial office buildings in downtown DC and manages four additional properties in the metropolitan area on behalf of third parties. The company prides itself on delivering superior services and high quality projects that consistently exceed client expectations. A recognized leader in the DC real estate market, Blake has won numerous awards for both property management and leasing.

Blake Real Estate's construction division is a thriving business enterprise, with approximately 150 discrete projects a year totaling $20-$50M in annual revenues. But the company's hodgepodge system of spreadsheets and paper logs created significant project management challenges for its small construction staff. While the team managed to keep projects on schedule and on budget, its manual processes were riddled with inefficiencies – new logs and forms were created for each project. In addition, each person had their own way of doing things, which created a complete lack of process standardization.

"We have good project people that were very diligent, even in the face of outdated tools," explains Donald Silverstein, Blake's Vice President of Development. "But if anyone fell behind on record keeping, it became a burdensome thing to get caught up." Senior Project Manager, J.J. Campbell, agrees. "The biggest problem with our manual system was that it kept us from being efficient, which wasted time that could have been spent more productively."

Project-Based Software

After studying a number of different systems, Prolog Manager from Meridian Systems stood out from the pack. "Prolog is project-based, rather than accounting-based like many of the other systems on the market, which really impressed us during the evaluation process," says Silverstein.

In 2003, Blake purchased Prolog through E3Synergy, a technology consulting firm and Meridian authorized reseller based in Owings Mills, MD. To simplify the implementation, Blake decided not to migrate data from existing projects. Instead, E3Synergy provided basic training and support services to Blake's core construction staff and new projects were rolled out using the software. "Like any other system, we learned Prolog by experimenting with it," explains Silverstein. "And when we had questions, E3Synergy was very quick to respond."

Within a short time frame, Blake had incorporated many of Prolog's capabilities into its project management operations. "Prolog works so well for us out of the box because it's such a well-designed, industry specific program," says Campbell. "The cost control and contract management features have been the most important to our team. They've helped us standardize the way we run our projects, handle our purchasing and create documents."

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> *J.J. Campbell*
> *Senior Project Manager*
> *Blake Real Estate, Inc.*

Greater Efficiency across the Board

Without question, the biggest benefit that Prolog has delivered to Blake has been increased efficiency across the board. "Everything we did before, we did on a stand-alone basis," states Campbell. "With Prolog, we never have to enter the same information twice. Everything we do in the software builds on something else. That's a real plus for us."

Subcontract change orders are one example. To create a subcontract change order before Prolog, the original subcontract had to be manually modified to reflect the change, and the change order had to be generated by hand. "With Prolog," says Campbell, "there's no hunting around for information or revising a form. I just type in a few numbers and hit print."

Managing drawing changes is another example. Previously, if Blake received a revised set of drawings that had to be sent out to half a dozen subcontractors, they would log each set in a spreadsheet and create individual transmittals using Microsoft® Word. Now the team can update the drawing list in a few minutes, click a couple of buttons to print the transmittals and quickly get the drawings out the door.

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Automating Bid Invitations

Blake's bid invitation process has also been significantly improved by Prolog. "In days gone by," explains Campbell, "we used to notify bidders about new projects by calling them up. If we were going to invite 50 trade contractors to bid on a project, it would take us a day or more to make our calls. And the success rate of reaching people was probably 50 percent."

In the more recent past, the faxing of bid invitations replaced the phone call process. But even that was tedious and time consuming. Generating 50 separate documents – even with mail merge capabilities – and faxing each one by hand was just a marginal improvement over individual calls.

"In Prolog," says Campbell, "there's a wizard that automates the bid invitation process. All of our subcontractor information is stored in our database, so in just a few minutes we can set up a bid package, select the bidders that we want to send it to and fax the information to our list right from Prolog. We never have to print anything and we never have to leave our desks. A manual process that used to take us days, in some cases, can now be done in minutes."

This increased efficiency has allowed Blake to modify the responsibilities of its construction support staff. "Instead of typing up 50 transmittals and faxing each one," says Silverstein, "our office staff can spend their time doing more meaningful tasks that better support our construction operations."

Bridging a Gap, Building a Brand

Although Blake utilizes many of Prolog's core functionality, the company continues to work with E3Synergy to expand its use of the software and leverage the program's custom reporting capabilities. "E3Synergy has provided us with solid support throughout the years," Silverstein says. "If they can help us produce Prolog documents that mirror other documents throughout the company, that's a big bonus."

The standardization provided by Prolog reinforces the stellar reputation that Blake has worked so hard to achieve. "In our marketing materials, we always mention Prolog when we talk about how technologically advanced we are," says Silverstein. And Campbell is quick to point out that this isn't just hype. "Prolog absolutely improves our level of service to our customers because we're more organized and better able to manage the things that need to be managed on a project."

E3Synergy

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Blake Real Estate Project Profile

Renovation of the American Bankers Association's Headquarters Located in Washington, D.C.

When the American Bankers Association (ABA) renewed its 120,000 square foot lease with Blake Real Estate, the agreement included renovation of the five floors they occupied. Blake worked with the ABA and their architect to re-develop the space to support the organization's current needs, technological requirements and image.

The renovation required demolition and build-out of each floor. The ABA maintained occupancy and operation on four floors during construction and Blake provided swing space to relocate occupants to alternate floors during renovation. Floors were renovated one at a time and re-occupied as completed.

Key Project Elements

› New, state-of-the-art, 600 sq. ft. data center

› Custom materials used at key locations to reflect the organization's image

› Installation of elegant, low profile T-5 fluorescent lights to maximize energy efficiency and leverage ceiling height

› Creative installation of stone and tile to provide a unique entrance for each floor

Contract Amount: $7M
Start Date: June 1, 2006
Completion Date: December 1, 2007

Results: During the renovation process, which was completed ahead of schedule, the ABA completed a merger that significantly increased the organization's staff structure. Blake was able to accommodate the organizational changes with substantial modifications to the original design during construction. The ABA has subsequently leased an additional floor in the building and the space is currently being designed for their use.

![Meridian Systems]

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