



ONEIR HELPS LUMBER AND BUILDING SYSTEMS BUSINESS MANAGE BOOM TIMES

Construction industry supplier, ZyTech Building Systems, upgrades from Vigilant accounting software to Oneir Solutions' Linux-based system to perform its accounting and inventory control and integrate with ZyTech's advanced building specification application from Keymark
by Andy Shaw

They sure don't build them like they used to. At least not at ZyTech Building Systems Inc. based in Balzac, Alberta. Certainly, ZyTech provides top quality roof trusses, floor systems, and bundled lumber to builders of residential, commercial, and farm construction as other companies do. But for each project at ZyTech, building designers use engineer-approved software to select just the right engineered wood products to suit each builder's plans. On the ZyTech shop floor, automated machinery speeds the precise selection, alterations, and packaging of builder's orders. Small wonder then, especially given Alberta's robust economy, that business at ZyTech is booming and indeed expanding beyond its somewhat remote Balzac headquarters - beginning with two new sales-and-design outlets in Red Deer and Okotoks, which are closer to major construction markets.

Handling that growth was made

much easier, says ZyTech's controller, Ross Clements, thanks to the upgrade the company made from Vigilant to the similar but much more dynamic Oneir Solutions' Linux-based accounting. Orders, for instance, can now flow in seamlessly via Oneir from their new outlets be passed on electronically to manufacturing on the floor at Balzac.

"We're in the process of expanding our business quite dramatically. But Oneir has helped us manage that very well."

"Every business is different, so we chose Oneir at least partly because being Linux-based we could customize it in a way that we could integrate our accounting much more closely with just about every aspect of our particular business," says Clements. "Also, because it still has much of the look and feel of Vigilant it was easy for our staff to start using so there was really no interruption to our work when we made the change."

Perhaps the most important aspect of ZyTech's business that

Oneir has been readily adapted to, is the building specification software from Keymark Enterprises in Boulder, Colorado that ZyTech uses to streamline its business.

"Our KeyPlan software is used by ZyTech's design people so they can figure out what kinds of structural materials are needed to meet the requirements of their customer's building plan," explains Keith Dietzen, Keymark's president and original designer of KeyPlan.

"Once KeyPlan has helped them determine what kind of and how many materials they need, it passes the data through an interface across to ZyTech's own internal systems including their accounting software."

Once that happens, Oneir Solutions then takes back command.

"Oneir is actually involved right from the start of the sales process," says Jane Giggall, president of Oneir Solutions Inc. in Toronto. "Sales people at ZyTech use the Oneir quotation system to track a sale right from the initial contact, and make the conversion to a bid, then to a price, and on to an order, to a shipping notice, and eventually to an invoice. This eliminates any duplication of effort and al-

lows our clients to keep control of each and every step along the sales cycle while minimizing mistakes."

In the past those mistakes could have been minor keying errors that could result in the major frustration of a construction delay.

"It's pretty easy to understand how a tired or distracted employee when transferring specs from one system to another could key in a '2 inch by 6 inch' spec for a load of lumber instead of '2 by 4'," says Giggal.

Now Oneir moves the sale along in lock-step with the KeyPlan specifications free from human error.

"What this eliminates is the need for multiple entry accounting," says Dietzen. "And that fits perfectly with our mantra at Keymark of 'single building model technology' which basically says to the building and construction industry: You only need to describe the structure you want to build once. And from that one description, KeyPlan hands off all the data about the materials you need to your other systems without you ever having to re-enter quantities or part numbers."

Those quantities and numbers flow without needing re-entry and without alteration from the KeyPlan software on to the computerized saws, lathes, and other equipment ZyTech uses during manufacturing and from there straight through to accounting and inventory control, in effect tying all of the company's systems together.

To help achieve that unity, Oneir

system specialists worked with counterparts at both Keymark and ZyTech to add a customized single-view dimension to the Oneir software.

"We can now see what we have on hand, see what's committed to our customers, and therefore see what we need to re-order," says Clements. "What also was very helpful in this whole process was that Oneir built a hook to our engineering design system (KeyPlan). So now what we can do is download a bill of material from the design system into Oneir and it will find the right product codes for every piece on that bill and commit what's needed out of the inventory to that order.

"Customers are getting the best of both the Windows and Linux worlds."

For instance, we might sell a \$5,000 floor package to a builder that might contain as many as 300 different items in various quantities. But by hitting the F8 function key just once, Oneir imports all that data and we can see instantly if we have enough inventory on hand to fulfill that order."

It is this intimate integration of design and accounting systems that makes ZyTech manageable even in the face of rapid growth and expansion.

"We're in the process of expanding our business quite dramatically. But Oneir has helped us manage that very well," says Clements. "I think the Linux

base to the software is important to that. It moves data around in small packets but very fast. So it means we can see in real time the state of our inventory in other locations just as we can at our main one here in Balzac. And even here, we've expanded the size of our floor operations by about 50 percent. So that means lots of interruptions by carpenters and electricians. But even when the power goes down and our local generator comes on line in response, Oneir comes right back up too without any loss of data."

Nor is there any confusion about the way that information is presented to ZyTech staff.

"Even though the backbone of the Oneir system is Linux, all the people using Oneir can see the information on their standard Windows-based workstations and laptops," says Giggal. "So they are using tools they are accustomed to but they are performing their tasks now with a speed and agility they haven't ever seen before. In short, ZyTech and its customers are getting the best of both the Windows and Linux worlds."

Evidently, Oneir Solutions doesn't build accounting systems like they used to either.

Andy Shaw is a freelance writer, broadcaster and international journalist with articles in many business and technical publications.