

TekTonics: Software Case Study

High Point, Higher Performance

A city with huge annual influxes of people needed a huge people management update. Done.

BY BRIAN MURPHY

When your city almost doubles in size every six months, your main concern as an administrator is that everyone, visitors and residents alike, enjoys a safe, welcoming community. And first and foremost, you must manage and deploy a varied workforce, including fire and police staff.

This is an apt description for the City of High Point, N.C., which just about doubles its population every six months when it hosts a popular furniture tradeshow. When a city is dubbed the “Furniture Capital of the World” and “North Carolina’s International City,” it’s certain that the region probably enjoys a steady influx of visitors. That’s definitely the case for High Point, located in the Piedmont Triad region in the north-central part of the state. With a population of more than 100,000, High Point is the eighth largest municipality in North Carolina. It’s also well known for its extensive furniture and textile businesses. The semi-annual High Point Market, the largest furnishings industry trade show in the world, draws another 100,000 visitors to the area for 10 days every six months, effectively doubling the local population.

But High Point faced significant challenges in managing its human resources, supply chain, and financial systems. Hampered by an outdated, character-driven, labor-intensive software system that was built on an aging computer infrastructure, the city’s system was supportable by only one person.

This dependence on a single individual put the city at risk both because that person was over-tasked, and because other staff members couldn’t step in to help if a crisis occurred. Another problem was that all activities, including hiring, job reviews, and purchasing, were tied to a time-intensive, paper-based format. Administrators also needed to manage a \$500 million capital projects budget, which meant they needed more robust tools for tracking expenditures than they had at their disposal. Finally, administrators at High Point wanted to be able to bring their general ledger reporting in line with recommendations established by the Government Finance Officer’s Association (GFOA), a group that works to enhance and promote the professional management of government by developing rules for financial policies and reporting.

MAKING THE SELECTION

High Point relied on GFOA functionality guidelines when it requested RFPs from a variety of software vendors. High Point also needed expert assistance to implement the system it selected. Tom Spencer, systems project administrator, High Point, says, “All the popular vendors responded to our RFP, including Tier 1 providers. We liked some of the Tier 1 systems, but their costs were just way out of our price range.”

High Point ultimately chose Lawson Human Capital Management, Lawson Financials and Lawson Supply Chain Management. “Lawson fit

Key Challenges Faced by High Point

- Outdated software built on aging computer infrastructure
- Reliant on only one staffer who could support the system
- Labor-intensive processes demanded extensive staff time
- Needed to meet mandates for “good government reporting” spelled out by GFOA
- Needed a flexible software system and new applications that would provide support as the city grows.

the perfect niche for us,” says Spencer, “because it offered us a Tier 1 product at a Tier 2 price. In particular, it was the capabilities of the Lawson HR application that really sold us on their products.”

Lawson brought new capabilities to the city that were both dramatic and immediate when it came to managing High Point’s diverse workforce. “I love this product!” says LeighAnne Bassinger, human resources analyst, High Point. “In particular, I really love ProcessFlow—the control it gives me, the oversight ability, and the ‘tree-friendly,’ paper-free emphasis is phenomenal. I can handle rate changes, job changes, and promotions very quickly. In the past, this required a great deal of employee time in that paper reviews had to go from a timekeeper to a director to an HR director for final approval. Now I can see any of these changes at the click of a mouse.”

Special considerations for employees, such as managing Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) or military leave requests, as well as keeping track of personnel files, are now updated at the touch of a button.

“In the past,” says Bassinger, “we’ve had timekeepers mistakenly put people on FMLA before we were able to record that in the system. We would be fixing those errors and the problems that resulted months after the fact. That just doesn’t happen anymore. And today, if we transfer, terminate, or promote someone, ProcessFlow automatically creates a new requisition. That means we don’t miss any vacancies, and that just wasn’t the case in the past.”

ADDED BENEFITS

The new system has also reduced the number of overdue performance reviews, a problem that plagued High Point in the past. “There was just no way to automate past-due review paperwork,” Bassinger says.

"I had to do it all manually. There were on average 100 overdue reviews when my workload allowed me to send managers a notice of their overdue reviews. With the new automated system, it can ping managers weekly to remind them to complete their overdue reviews. Our past-due numbers have dropped dramatically since managers are receiving a weekly notice."

Another benefit? Lawson helps put a face on a widespread and ever-changing workforce. "A functionality we like is that when a manager has 300 people, he or she may not be able to remember them all, so the Lawson system lets us include employee photos," Spencer says. "The system also easily organizes other personal data such as birthdays, emergency contacts, when an employee's last raise occurred, and their former position. That gives supervisors immediate access to information they need, especially in the case of injured workers. This saves us significant time on the management side."

And Lawson also empowers employees to find information they need, such as old paycheck stubs. Employees can easily access a view-only screen to see that information in their files. "That alone has saved us hundreds of hours in phone calls to timekeepers," Spencer says. "With Lawson and our new time keeping system, it probably saves us the equivalent of one or two full-time people. I've had timekeepers tell me specifically that with the new systems, they have saved 100 hours a year. And we have a total of 45 timekeepers. I would say an average savings per timekeeper is a week a year."

Given that a key focus for HR departments is tracking and managing employee payroll, up-to-the-minute reporting functionalities are key.

"The payroll module provides a high level of functionality and integrates well with the Lawson Human Resources module," says Kelly Latham, accounting manager, High Point. "In addition, I really appreciate the ability to upload and query data on both the payroll and general ledger side using Microsoft Add-Ins."

"The system gives us phenomenal reports," adds Bassinger. "For instance, I can now run overtime expenditures by pay period in real-time. I used to have to pull overtime expenditures seven to nine times between January and May each year, and then we'd try to estimate what we'd see for the rest of the year based on that. Today any timekeeper can run those reports whenever the reports are needed. That real-time reporting allows city departments to better manage their overtime budget."

Managing both hiring and job transfers has also been vastly simplified.

"There are really simple things that make my job so much easier, like when I'm changing a position, I simply enter a four-digit number, add the defaults and I'm done," says Bassinger. "To be able to default all that information is outstanding."

While High Point officials are particularly enthusiastic about Lawson HR, they've also benefited from the advantages of Lawson Supply Chain Management and Lawson Financials. In the supply chain arena, High Point has been able to eliminate up to 10 separate manual processes and replace them with one 15-minute procedure. The system pushes information out to end-users, giving them the ability to find and select data them-

Money and Time Saving Achieved With Lawson

- **Saved 21 percent on upgrade costs**
- **Reduced dramatically the number of past-due employee performance reviews**
- **Saved 1,800 hours—nearly a year—of staff time formerly spent fielding employee payroll questions**
- **Saved six weeks of staff time on one annual CAFR report alone**
- **Potential savings by avoiding timekeeper errors resulting in payroll overpayments to employees**
- **Reduced paperwork time needed for employee hires from two weeks to 15 minutes**
- **Real-time overtime reporting improved accuracy of budget forecasting of costs through the year**
- **In supply chain arena, condensed 10 time-intensive manual processes into one 15-minute procedure.**

selves. This saves administrative time, as well as letting end-users find data right when they need it.

With Lawson Financials, High Point was able to "use Lawson out of the box," says Spencer. In addition, when Lawson Professional Services handled the upgrade for High Point, LPS came in 21 percent under their estimate. "That was huge saving to us," he adds. Additional time savings came. Producing a Comprehensive Annual Finance Report (CAFR), a key mandate from GFOA for city governments, now takes city officials only two weeks to complete, rather than the previous two months. Total time saved? Six weeks on that report alone.

"Our city wanted a core piece of software that we could build on in the future," says Spencer. Down the line, he's very interested in taking advantage of on-line benefits enrollment, new grant management features, and Lawson Strategic Sourcing. With specific public sector features built into these modules, the city plans to take advantage of functionality that will bring greater efficiencies and cost savings.

And as High Point gears up for its next seasonal influx of visitors, city officials are confident in their ability to accurately and effectively manage all of the city's resources to keep those visitors both happy—and coming back. **HRO**

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