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Blue Marlin Pools/Pool Pro Office

Busy builder of custom swimming pools branches out with a specialized FileMaker Pro office management solution

Based on the famous "Space Coast" of Florida, Blue Marlin Pools offers custom-designed, custom-built swimming pool construction to clients throughout the state's east-central region. In business now for over a dozen years, Blue Marlin Pools is noted for its meticulous, carefully-organized approach to customer service – an approach made possible by a purpose-built FileMaker Pro office management application. And after demonstrated success behind the scenes at Blue Marlin, the application is now available to pool builders everywhere as Pool Pro Office.

Business Challenge

Swimming pool construction involves many vital elements – all of them traditionally generating bushels of paperwork. Plans must be drawn, permits secured, and documents filed, and that's even before the actual excavation work can begin. Once the crews are on the jobsite, there's an even more voluminous flow of information between client, crew, and office, ensuring that the project adheres to both its budget and its specifications.

And, traditionally, this paperwork remains on paper. "Pool companies tend not to be computerized," comments Blue Marlin Pools vice president Mark Richter. "But as the younger generation takes over in these older companies, that's going to change."

It changed for Mark's company several years ago, when, inspired by developments observed at a pool industry trade association meeting, he decided the time was right to move from a simple "shared folder" concept for entering project data onto the office computer to a fully functional database system. "We developed a flow chart showing what it takes to build a swimming pool, with all the steps and processes," he recalls. "And then we realized once we could get this information on the computer, there were many things we could do with it. Our original idea of a simple 'shared folder' on our one office computer continuously grew."

That's when FileMaker Pro developer Gerard Beutler of Link-Net Inc. entered the picture. Working closely with Mark, Gerard developed the first version of a customized office management

Overview

Builder of custom swimming pools for clients across east-central Florida
Based in Melbourne, FL
Approximately 40 employees

Industry

Small Business

Solutions

Full-featured office management solution based on FileMaker Pro 8.5 processes every necessary business operation – marketed to other pool builders as Pool Pro Office.

Benefits

Web Viewer in FileMaker Pro 8.5 allows customization of job orders with up-to-date weather information, property appraisals, permitting data, and maps to jobsites.
Centralized office management application allows operation with a streamlined staff – saving an estimated \$3000 a month in personnel costs.

application in FileMaker Pro 8. And with a subsequent upgrade to FileMaker Pro 8.5, the result is a tool that has not only become an invaluable part of Blue Marlin's business, but also a tool to be marketed to pool builders everywhere.

Successful Solution

Full information on all projects, in the office or in the field – and all accessible through a simple, user-friendly FileMaker Pro interface. That's how the data is managed now at Blue Marlin Pools. "We can track our leads and where they come from, track all scheduling, communications, service, and warranty calls for any project, and generate financial reports," comments Mark. Running efficiently on a cross-platform assortment of Dell PCs and Apple PowerBooks, and available to users over an internal company network, the application stores documentation on over 750 past and ongoing projects, with more added all the time. And now other pool builders are adopting the system for themselves. "Gerard and I developed the program for marketing through our company, Pool Pro Office," Mark continues. "We've taken it to trade shows and have already gotten several pool builders signed up – and we expect interest in our solution to grow as a new technology-conscious generation takes over in the pool industry."

Customer Benefits

At Blue Marlin Pools, efficient and easy access to project information means real cost savings – which are especially important these days, when the overall pool industry is facing a downturn. "The biggest benefit is that we can access records anytime, any place, anywhere. I can examine schedules, review financial reports, without even coming to the office," explains Mark. "Recently I was attending a business meeting in Puerto Rico, and got a call on my cell phone from someone with a question on a job. I went into our database, looked up the information and had what I needed to know. FileMaker Pro lets you carry your whole office with you, wherever you go. It enhances our productivity, it improves our communication with our customers, and it reduces labor costs, too. We've been able to provide the same level of service with fewer people – saving us maybe \$3000 a month in personnel costs."

The Web Viewer function in FileMaker Pro 8.5 is especially valuable – providing dynamic access to essential project information without the need for storage on local servers. That means faster, more reliable access to accurate data. "We have a direct link through the Web Viewer to weather information for each project, Mark points out, "along with a direct link to maps to jobsites. We can also link to property appraisals and legal descriptions for permit purposes. " Future plans call for integration of vendor catalogs, enabling instant online ordering from within the FileMaker Pro application. "Our goal," declares Mark, "is to have a program where you can come in, log on in the morning, and never have to leave the program for the rest of the day!"

"FileMaker Pro lets you carry your whole office with you, wherever you go. It enhances our productivity, it improves our communication with our customers...Our goal is to have a program where you can come in, log on in the morning, and never have to leave the program for the rest of the day!"

Mark Richter, Vice President, Blue Marlin Pools

Contact information

Contact Info for Customer:

Mark Richter
Vice President
Blue Marlin Pools
321-259-1233
mrichter@bluemarlinpools.com
<http://www.bluemarlinpools.com>

Filemaker Contact:

Kevin Mallon
Public Relations Manager
FileMaker Inc.
408-987-7227
kevin_mallon@filemaker.com
<http://www.filemaker.com>