

Best Software® brings “winds of change” to the Museum of Science and Industry



Customer

Museum of Science & Industry (MOSI). Science and technology-based museum designed to educate the public on practical applications of science within modern industry

Challenge

MOSI needed an integrated payroll system within its corporate general ledger that was also able to allocate salary, taxes and benefits expenses from its 25 different departments

Solution

Abra Payroll®

Results

Abra Payroll (and Abra HR® in the near future) enables museum management to more accurately forecast budgets and payroll by integrating projections from each of MOSI's various departments

Have you ever wondered what it's like to hear the roaring winds from a Category 1 hurricane? This is just one of the many interactive experiences available to the public at Tampa's Museum of Science & Industry, nicknamed "MOSI."

Opened in 1982, MOSI is now one of the most popular educational destinations in the Southeast, with some of the most innovative and hands-on exhibits in the country. Opening within the next 12 months, "Disasterville" will expose its audience to several of the structural design elements used in architecting buildings and houses, making them able to withstand nature's most powerful forces such as hurricanes, tornadoes and earthquakes.

Bringing it all under one umbrella

MOSI includes an IMAX Dome theater, a gift shop and 25 separate support divisions, such as operations, food and beverage, finance, marketing and janitorial, among others. Earlier this year, it was facing a near disaster of its own because of its inability to accurately forecast budget and project payroll. MOSI was using an online payroll system that was unable to efficiently integrate with its general ledger. As a result, the accounting and payroll departments had to manually re-key salary, taxes and benefits information from each of its departments each month back into a centralized payroll and general ledger component.

Since each of these departments conceptually operates as an individual business – each with their own P&L statements, benefits package, salaried workforce and budget allocations – the museum had to be able to estimate costs by functional area in order to assess departmental profitability.

"I wouldn't necessarily say we were in the middle of a disaster," said CFO Jeanette Baker. "But, we were definitely beginning to feel the rumbling of trouble. We needed to have a much more flexible and powerful budgeting and reporting tool."

While MOSI's previous payroll system did enable online payroll processing, it was delivered through an application service provider (ASP) which meant that there were few customizations allowed to enable specific functionality such as detailed or ad hoc reporting capabilities.

"Most of our reports were canned templates that could not be customized," said Baker. "We needed a system that enabled our department heads to manage their profitability and, at the same time, allowed our corporate executives to see the holistic financial picture."

The museum also employs a large number of temporary and seasonal workers to help address fluctuations and peak visitation periods. With this influx of temporary workers, MOSI needed to be able to process on-demand checks between pay cycles. Its former payroll system just didn't allow that functionality.

In addition to integration and reporting flexibility, MOSI also needed the ability to process payroll more quickly. This simply was not possible with a remotely hosted solution that required MOSI to send ACH transfer requests through an Internet service provider (ISP), which would then authorize the transaction - often several hours after the initial request.

"It just became too frustrating because we realized that there had to be a better system - and

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one that solved all of our needs," said Paula Borrer, payroll processor for MOSI. So, in February 2001, MOSI set off to find an alternative.

Calming the storm

After conducting due diligence and speaking with three different solution providers (including the payroll reseller from MOSI's general ledger vendor), Baker and her staff turned to the Tampa-based Caisson Group, a reseller of business management solutions that offered Best Software's Abra Suite, an award-winning HR and payroll solution for mid-sized companies. Industry software veterans, Sergio Mendez and Sue Erickson, head up the Caisson Group.

Already familiar with Mendez's IT experience and Erickson's payroll knowledge from their success with other Tampa-based clients, MOSI approached the firm to help bridge its payroll and general ledger systems and to add a much needed dose of enterprise-wide flexibility and feature customization.

By mid-March, MOSI had selected Caisson to implement Best's Abra Payroll module. The two teams met at MOSI's campus for their first of many weekly planning meetings, at which they developed detailed project management schematics, allowing the Caisson team to assign responsibilities and create a parallel payroll system that would eventually convert MOSI to a fully-functional payroll system without any downtime.

"The entire process was so smooth," said Baker. "Caisson Group knew their stuff. They knew our business, they knew Abra's functionality and they knew how to combine the two to make what we feel is just a fantastic solution."

Caisson worked tirelessly for just under four weeks to complete the implementation process that involved data conversion, data input, testing and training. Internal payroll personnel from MOSI helped to re-key the payroll and benefits information along with Erickson, who was onsite at MOSI at least three days every week.

For organizations such as MOSI that don't have a dedicated project manager or IT and payroll specialist, it was especially important for Caisson to resolve every issue in a timely manner.

"If there's one aspect to this process that I vividly remember – it's the time and effort that Caisson took to ensure that each of us were fully up-to-date on the Abra Payroll system," said Borrer.

Once all of the payroll, salary, tax and benefits data had been re-entered and compiled, both Erickson and Mendez spent nearly three days at MOSI training key executives on the many features and benefits of the new Abra system.

Clear skies ahead

Today, Abra has been fully implemented for several pay cycles and MOSI has already realized significant returns on its investment.

"Running a payroll cycle used to take nearly three days to complete with our previous system," said Borrer. "Abra's ability to integrate with our general ledger and collect and allocate budgeting and financial data from our various departments has reduced this process to just one and a half days."

The payroll department formerly had to spend more than eight hours entering and manually verifying timecard information using a basic Internet connection and standard reports that were unable to sort by employee name. Now the data can be entered, sorted, and verified in just three hours.

"Abra Payroll is the complete solution," said Baker. "With the click of a button, my team can process payroll and generate the reports I need for our executive board. Now, I have the time to devote to other larger strategic issues at hand, and they have the reports and analysis to ensure MOSI remains a profitable and successful organization."

MOSI's future plans include the implementation of Best's Abra HR module, providing additional integration within the organization's overall business management system. Abra HR will enable MOSI to better analyze its staff productivity and increase its hiring, training and retention levels.

"Abra Payroll really rescued us," said Borrer.

Now, if Best and Abra could only develop a system to better forecast hurricanes – that would definitely be a feature attraction.

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- Abra Payroll[®]
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