

Shorr Packaging finds Abra HRMS a Manageable Alternative to PeopleSoft

by Robert Gast



As people busy themselves trying to think outside the box these days, Shorr Packaging Corp. is giving thought to the box itself. Shorr (www.shorr.com) has built a formidable reputation over 82 years by providing innovative packaging solutions and supplies.

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While the packaging systems that Shorr sells are painstakingly designed to fit specific client requirements, the Human Resources system used to manage their 150-person workforce in Illinois, Iowa, Indiana and Ohio, was not. It was, in fact, generic, consisting of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and Word documents.

By applying Abra software technologies from Best! Software to the challenges Shorr faced in managing a growing mass of employee data, and allowing them to more easily manage benefits, compulsory reporting and so on, Shorr was able to make their two person HR department the model of efficiency.

As the end of 2002 approached, Aurora, Illinois-based Shorr was completing the implementation of a new Enterprise Resource

Planning software system from PeopleSoft. PeopleSoft ERP was initially selected to manage the distribution and financial side of Shorr's business. Since the first software package sold by PeopleSoft in 1984 was a human resources system, management at Shorr reasoned that their HR module would also serve all their current Personnel, compliance benefit compensation & reporting needs and accommodate growth as they started bringing in other units.

Shorr used PeopleSoft HR for only one and a half years. Connie Shaffer, Shorr's Manager of Human Resources admits, "We were naive when we added this HR module. As we got further into it I realized I couldn't keep it going as the business expanded- in order to develop it further, two additional

IT people would be necessary. We didn't want to increase the size of the IT department any further because it is very costly. Also, the reporting aspect of it was so vanilla that you had to create all your own reports. We felt the best investment would be to put it back in the box and find a more user-friendly system."

Shorr Packaging Corp.
Strategic packaging solutions.

Shaffer reached into her past for answers. Before managing Shorr's HR department, she worked for the encyclopedia publisher, World Book, Inc., where she was introduced to Abra HR. She explains that she was always comfortable with Abra, so she obtained an evaluation copy to show to other Shorr managers. Now, on their list of evaluation criterion, in addition to issues directly related to functionality was a point regarding 'minimal involvement from IT'. Shaffer states, "We selected Abra because it was so easy to use compared to the other solutions out there."

"They were wonderful. Their technical people are a dream to work with. I attended some of their classes as well- I would attend any of Marianne Sullivan's classes. She makes them interesting and fun- she is very knowledgeable and talented."

Connie Shaffer, Human Resources Manager, Shorr Packaging, Corp.

Inside the Box

Abra HR, part of the industry-leading Abra Suite HRMS, runs on Windows-based computers including Windows XP, and integrates with Microsoft Office Suite. It features database query capabilities; reporting tools to aid with government compliance and strategic planning, benefits administration capabilities, a facility to manage employee training and certification, health history, and salary analysis capabilities. According to Rob Denkewalter, President of Solutions, Technology and Software, a 'Best! Top 1% Business Partner,' "Abra HR is the most widely used Windows based HR

package in the U.S. because its effective in small to mid sized business environments like Shorr Packaging. After minimal training, Abra HR users can fully exploit all of its features. crystal reports, the most highly rated report generator available, is now integrated into Abra HR, which makes generating custom reports for management, a very easy task. crystal reports reduces processing and running times by up to 90%. The older Abra Report Writer handled memory inefficiently and took more time compiling large reports. Tests have proven that a report that takes 20 minutes to run in the old Abra Report Writer now takes under 45 seconds with crystal."

Although Shaffer was comfortable around Windows based servers and networks, she had Chicago area based STS spend two days onsite and help with its installation and configuration on the company's Windows NT-based server. "I didn't have them do the complete setup because I could handle it." While onsite, STS technicians re-familiarized her

with a few of Abra's fundamentals. Commenting on STS's performance Shaffer adds, "They were wonderful. Their technical people are a dream to work with. I attended some of their classes as well- I would attend any of Marianne Sullivan's classes. She makes them interesting and fun- she is very knowledgeable and talented."

Abra has just celebrated its one-year anniversary at Shorr. Shaffer says without reservation, "It has paid for itself. You save money on salary because it's logically organized and easy to use and maintain. Since it has so many functions it reduces staff overhead. Also, the reporting aspect is very easy."

Shaffer has several years of experience with Abra and has used its Report Writer feature extensively. "Now that Abra has replaced Report Writer with crystal reports, creating custom reports is much easier," she observes. "Report Writer is a little challenging if you're not comfortable with queries. crystal reports is much more logical and end user friendly than report



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writer. Our managers went from having no HR reports to having any custom report they want. Now they ask me for reports all the time."

Linked to the Web

The Abra Employee Self Service module that was implemented last fall gives Shorr employees the ability to log on to an employee self service intranet with a common web browser and make changes to personal information and health care coverage. ESS is a secured system that requires a user ID and password. "Our flexible benefit enrollment this year was done on-line and all they had to do was go through the employee self service module in order to link to it," according to Shaffer. When changes are made, she gets an alert. "It synchs right into HR so it reduces data entry for the HR department."



Is Shaffer pleased with Abra's performance over the past year? "I've been able to get it to do everything I want," she says. "I'm extremely happy with Abra. It has saved our company a tremendous amount of money." Shaffer adds that following tax season, she will install the new release of Abra HR without any help from the IT department.

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