

After a failed development effort, storage firm finds success with DBI

case study

Client

Nolan Bros., which owns and manages EZ Storage® facilities in Minnesota, Massachusetts and Ohio.

Business challenge

Nolan Bros. needed to replace an aging mission-critical software system – but they were gun-shy after a previous effort that took a year and cost several hundred thousand dollars had failed.

DBI Consulting solution

Instead of charging in to start rewriting code, DBI Consulting convinced Nolan Bros. to a step back and evaluate existing software products to determine if one would meet their needs. DBI then led a structured RFI and RFP process, which uncovered an existing product that met more than 95 percent of Nolan Bros.' requirements.

Client benefits

- Saved money – Nolan Bros. found a solution for one-third of the cost of its failed development effort.
- Saved time – The first development effort took more than a year and didn't deliver a functioning system. The RFP process with DBI took three months, and the time from vendor selection to implementation will be about nine months.
- Solved the right business problem – Instead of starting an unnecessary development effort, DBI helped Nolan find an existing product.
- Gained valuable process experience – DBI shared its experience and expertise in software selection and project management.



Background

Darren Aune was gun-shy. And who could blame him? He had just spent more than a year and several hundred thousand dollars on a failed effort to rewrite his firm's most mission-critical software system.

Aune is CFO at Nolan Bros., the Minneapolis-based firm that owns and manages EZ Storage® facilities in Minnesota, Massachusetts and Ohio. According to Aune, the software system in question handles all of the firm's leases, payments and customer accounts. "It's the backbone of our organization, but it was developed in the mid-'90s," he said. "It was functional but didn't scale. Our plan was to rewrite it in a web application."

So Aune hired a custom-software-development firm, but after a year of work, they failed to deliver a functioning system. "We worked way too long, spent way too much money and received disappointing results," he said. "It was excruciating, to say the least."

Second try is a charm

After that first painful effort, it was nearly a year before Aune was ready to tackle the development project again. Recognizing that he needed strong project leadership this time around, he contacted the Project Management Institute (PMI) for a reference. PMI put him in touch with DBI Consulting, a leading business technology consulting firm in Minneapolis.

Aune called DBI to find a project manager but ended up with much more. "In my initial meeting with DBI, they changed my way of thinking about the entire project," he said.

Scott Lien, CEO of DBI Consulting, explains: "The previous firm had come in and just started rewriting code without determining any real business goals or requirements. So we decided to take a step back."

“DBI asked great questions and helped us formulate a plan,” Aune said. “They challenged our assumption that we needed home-grown software; they told us there likely were existing software packages that would meet our needs. At the end of that first meeting, they told me, ‘We can provide a PM for your project, but we don’t think you’re even ready for a project yet.’ That really made me sit up and take notice.”

DBI solves the *right* problem, then leads RFI and RFP processes

But he was impressed with DBI’s approach and hired the firm to define the requirements and lead a request for information (RFI) process to determine if there were any existing software packages that would fit Nolan Bros.’ needs.

At the end of the 10-week process, DBI had uncovered six software packages that met more than 80 percent of Nolan Bros.’ requirements, four of which exceeded 90 percent and two of which exceeded 95 percent.

DBI then designed and led the request for proposal (RFP) process, provided project management, coached the Nolan Bros. team, distributed the RFP, scored the responses, selected the top vendors for presentations, and oversaw the final selection and contract negotiations.

“DBI provided valuable expertise in software selection and overall project management,” said Aune. “They not only told us what the steps should be, they told us how long each step would take and defined the role of each person on the team. They knew what they were doing and had a great way of going about accomplishing the goal.”

Aune said DBI encouraged him to include end users, not just management, in the selection process. “That turned out to be very valuable advice,” he said. “Our end users had great insight to share, they were flattered to be involved in the process and, as a result, were able to secure their buy-in.”

In June 2005, Nolan Bros. awarded its contract to HI-TECH for its RentPlus software. DBI then helped create the software implementation plan, including two pilots and the full rollout to 22 additional locations. The new system is already installed in the first two facilities and is getting rave reviews from managers. Aune expects the full rollout to be complete in six months.

In the end, he said, “DBI made sure we focused on solving the *right* business problem. Rather than leading us through a costly development effort, they helped us find and implement an existing software system that satisfied our business requirements—one that took less time to implement and cost about one-third of the price of our first effort. We couldn’t be happier.”



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