

BUCKING THE SYSTEM: INTEGRATING iOFFICE

FBL Financial Group, Inc.



Today's workplace is challenged on many fronts, not least of which are the fast-paced evolution of technologies and the resultant opportunities spurring companies to perform better, faster, and more efficiently. The widespread use of mobile devices, the proliferation of cloud-based services and the consumerization of IT and computing applications worldwide are upending the way companies operate and compete in the global marketplace.

This upheaval has implications for employee workspace, office location, real estate and facilities management functions. Where companies locate their physical offices and manage their real estate and corporate facilities, how they design their workspaces and steer a posse of related services are all converging with innovations in cloud computing, mobility and demand for consumer-friendly technologies.

This dynamic spurred the FBL Financial Group, a holding company whose purpose is to protect livelihoods and futures, to make some innovative changes to their Facilities Management processes. Jodi Parrott, Sr. Staff Facilities Planning Analyst at FBL Financial Group, Inc., shares their story.

CHALLENGE

With eight office locations plus a headquarters housing some 1600 employees across eight states, FBL Financial Group needed to find a better way to manage its facilities - including people and office moves, adds and changes. The average volume of more than 550 changes each quarter -- to onboard new hires, facilitate office moves, employee transfers and terminations, and provision office equipment and furnishings -- was growing fast with no end in sight.

FBL was saddled with an old system for integrated workplace management services (IWMS) that dated back to 1994. Their IWMS system could not easily process and manage all these changes without significant manual effort, slowing down the workflow. In its early days, the system was very simple without many bells or whistles, technically easy to use to get the job done. Over the decades, however, the software company that originally designed the system was purchased and sold several times over and, with each new owner, a new version launched. All the updated versions attempted to provide unique solutions for everything, but ended up becoming too complex even for today's computer programmer. The upgrades did little to simplify and streamline processes for FBL, and required more manual tweaking and customized, complicated workflows to get anything done.

In 2013, FBL realized that its old IWMS system needed a complete overhaul. Using this same old system to move people and make changes for workspace management, budget allocations by department, manage tenants and the normal flow of employee changes across eight states was no longer a viable option. Jodi was through with plugging data in, and pulling it out manually; tweaking processes to accommodate urgent needs and taking too much time to handle what should be routine business requests. The gaps in technical support and attention when she experienced system issues, the complex end-user experience and difficulty training newcomers to use the system, combined with the lack of easy integration with IT, HR, Procurement and other business functions, presented a nightmare challenge for Jodi and her company.

SOLUTION

FBL joined forces with iOffice, a true partner who offers simple, flexible tools to help Facilities Managers get their jobs done. The iOffice platform is a cloud-based, single point of access with multiple functions and support tools for integrated workplace management services (IWMS).

When Jodi and her team reviewed all the options, iOffice was the only system that came close to covering their needs with a single, ready-to-use interface. Being cloud-based, iOffice is easily integrated with other business applications, or it can stand on its own and deliver services quickly and conveniently via secure Internet connection. "Cloud" applications reside on iOffice operated servers in a secure, centralized environment, making it easier for clients such as FBL to order and access their own set of services and transactions – from any office, any time and in any location with secure Internet access.

iOffice promotes the concept of "WOW" – Wide Open Workspaces – which sees an opportunity in the convergence of cloud-based innovation and the "new age" of work, specifically addressing IWMS. iOffice is committed to providing software that helps companies run their businesses in the most effective manner for their specific needs. The iOffice platform is a suite of services designed to advance Facilities Management.

FBL chose iOffice for its holistic approach that can be easily integrated with other systems. For managing the space and location of people, Facilities Management needs input from Human Resources (HR). Data needs to be pulled from the HR system and fed into the iOffice system so that equipment can be ordered or reclaimed, office space allocated, and other processes

IMPLEMENTING iOFFICE

Taking your company's IWMS solution from point A to Z can take a long time to get right. Converting data and complex processes and managing subsequent changes from an old to a new system is intensive. At FBL, the iOffice conversion took under two months to go live. The FBL/iOffice project teams had to gather decades of data, office designs, site drawings and other documentation and enter it all into the new system. What was previously recorded in excel data sheets, such as the accounting of the company's purchased artwork hanging throughout its multiple office facilities, is now in the iOffice system and can be easily monitored and updated.

"iOffice has changed the way we do things," said Jodi Parrott. "It is simple, intuitive, and I love that it does so much with so little fanfare, so little complication."

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can take place. With the iOffice platform, the HR data feeds directly and automatically into the system, eliminating the need for anyone to enter duplicate information separately and manually for any employee moves, adds or changes. There is less user error, no duplicated efforts, and speedier change management.

“With iOffice, everything is simple,” Ms. Parrot explains. “Processing work orders to equip new employees, or to provision those who transfer to different locations with computers and phones, is all so much easier than it used to be. I simply log in, create a work order, save it as a PDF with the touch of a button in iOffice, click to attach it to a Service Desk ticket managed by the IT Service Desk system (also a cloud-based service solution), add a quick description, click on the date and hit send. This triggers a workflow that I don’t have to actively monitor or process manually to completion. It’s that simple!” iOffice saves time and delivers faster results.

SCENARIO PLANNING is another area that has seen vast improvement since FBL implemented iOffice. In the previous system, it was unnecessarily complicated and imprecise. Now, several possible scenarios can be sketched out using the iOffice tool, adding colors and names, to quickly show decision-makers how something could look in implementation. Using Auto-Cad for more detailed scenarios, drawings can be saved and stored for future reference in iOffice. When the Auto-Cad drawings are modified, these changes are processed and applied automatically, and available for anyone to access via the iOffice system.

EXISTING DEPARTMENTAL LAYOUT



NEW SCENARIO



RESULTS

The way FBL manages IWMS has changed dramatically. Time saved, faster communication and speedier transfers, moves and changes are all results that iOffice delivers, taking the pain out of facilities management.

"I'm really excited that they're starting a Report Writer function soon, adding a viable way to customize reporting that won't disrupt the entire system. Enhanced data collection and reporting is something that I could really use in my daily work," adds Jodi.

Onboarding, new hires, internal moves are happening all the time. Moves, adds and changes can be processed much more easily with iOffice. In the future, FBL foresees using iOffice to enhance its processes and methods for Building Management -- the structure, equipment and maintenance of its buildings.

An additional advantage of iOffice is that it requires little or no internal IT support. Since the cloud-based software is managed by iOffice on its own servers, it does not require localized IT support, which is not a core focus of most businesses. FBL has experienced very few technical hiccups with iOffice, and when they do occur, they are resolved quickly by the experts who own it, manage it and run it.

"iOffice takes the complication out of facilities management and allows people to get their jobs done," Jodi states. "We considered several other options when we were in review for another system. iOffice really listened to what our concerns were -- they really listened to what we were trying to do -- and brought that solution to the table. They're competitive, easy to implement and fabulous to work with. The solution is easy, everything is there, I just enter my specific requirements and the system talks to other systems easily, making things work simply and intuitively."



"Another area of interest for FBL is office layouts and interior design. Furniture and cubical standards have remained static for 28 years. During the next two years, we are investigating different layouts, updated spaces and new office configurations. There is so much potential to make use of the iOffice platform to reimagine and pre-plan the way we organize for our office of the future. It's very exciting."

– Jodi Parrott, Senior Staff Facilities Planning Analyst, FBL Financial, Inc.

JODI PARROTT, IIDA, LEED AP, is a Registered Interior Designer in the State of Iowa (Certificate No. 00023), and Senior Staff Facilities Planning Analyst for FBL Financial Group, Inc.

FBL FINANCIAL GROUP is a holding company whose purpose is to protect livelihoods and futures. Its primary operating subsidiary, Farm Bureau Life Insurance Company, underwrites and markets a broad range of life insurance and annuities to individuals and businesses, which are distributed by multiline exclusive Farm Bureau agents. In addition, FBL Financial Group manages all aspects of two Farm Bureau affiliated property-casualty insurance companies for a management fee. FBL Financial Group, headquartered in West Des Moines, Iowa, is traded on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol FFG. For more information, please visit www.fblfinancial.com.

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