

A Blue Ocean Systems Success Story ...



Bending Software to Fit A Fabricator



Mason Road Sheet Metal Provides a Unique Experience to Show the Versatility of SAP and Blue Ocean

About twenty miles west of Houston, along the I-10 lies the little prairie town of Katy, Texas, founded in 1895 as a rail hub for the rice and sugar cane the area produced. Legend has it the town was named for the Missouri-Kansas-Texas Railroad, commonly called the "K-T" Railroad that ran through that area in the 19th Century.

Katy's springs are the source of the Buffalo Bayou, a waterway that leads on down through the Port of Houston and into Galveston Bay, and is the winter home of millions of migratory birds from the upper Midwest and Canada, dwarfing the town's population of approximately 12,000.

But among the town's relatively small population are a number of famous past and present inhabitants, including country music star Clint Black, baseball pitcher Roger Clemens, Houston Rockets basketball star Yao Ming, and actress Renee Zellweger.

Perhaps not as well known, but starring in his own role in the economic and manufacturing sector of Katy, is Chris Jinks, owner of Mason Road Sheet Metal. The company, founded in 1989, provides high quality custom metal fabrication using the latest cutting edge technology. Since its humble founding almost twenty years ago, Jinks said Mason Road's reputation and sales have spread beyond the former railroad town's borders.

"Over the years we've seen business expand into the Houston area, and from Dallas to Austin and San Antonio," Jinks said, "and also to the neighboring state of Louisiana."

Jinks said Mason Road's expertise is servicing primarily mechanical contractors. "Our work is about 90% HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning)," he said, "and about 10% everything else." The client base includes everything from churches and schools to manufacturing facilities and office buildings, he added.

And with growth comes expansion. Jinks noted Mason Road soon will expand into a new building. By the time of its 20th anniversary in February 2009, Jinks said his company will more than double its "under roof" size, currently 30,000 sq. ft., to about 65,000 sq. ft.

And with growth and expansion, Jinks knew he needed far more than the traditional accounting software he was using. As the company was closing in on its physical expansion, Jinks realized the need for better coordinated control over everything from finances and billing to inventory, procurement and operations, as well as customer service and project management.



Along with three or four other software package vendors, Jinks called in Blue Ocean Systems to see what they could offer.

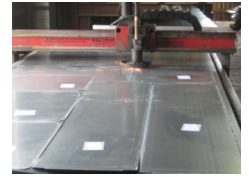
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"I'd like to say we were just looking for various software packages," Jinks explained, "but ours was a job that required a lot of creative input and not just 'off-the-shelf' solutions." "Mason Road isn't a traditional manufacturing company," Jinks said, noting that "we're a combination of manufacturing and fabrication." "Our business doesn't really fit the mold that most traditional software management and financial packages fit," he said.

"Most packages we looked at were locked into a manufacturing type of operation, and we're a hybrid of fabrication with a little manufacturing thrown in, so there are a lot of little details that just aren't readily available in "off the shelf" products for a fabricating facility." "We needed a lot of additions to the basic package, he observed."

So with his expansion plans in high gear, and knowing he needed a lot more than just accounting software, Jinks sat down with Blue Ocean in September 2007, among other companies, to discuss his needs and to see who could bring to the table exactly what he needed.

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And after the initial meetings, Jinks decided to go with Blue Ocean Systems. "What impressed me about Blue Ocean was the attention and detail that gave to my every idea and the overall concept of what I wanted," he said.

"Way before we even started talking about cost, they asked a lot of questions up front as to what we wanted, what we needed, and what we thought we might need," he added. "A lot of companies try to fit your business into their software," he noted. "With Blue Ocean, they wanted to fit their product into our business."

"They (Blue Ocean) really tried to think like they were in the fabrication business, and not in the computer software business, in those first meetings," Jinks said. "They asked a lot of questions like how we did things a certain way, and why we did those things in that way."

"They didn't just come in here and say 'here's our software package, this is what it costs, and this is how it will revolutionize your business, and then just pulling out the contract papers for me to sign," he added.

"The amount of time they spent with me and my staff way before we even got to what it would cost me, asking those questions, and trying to learn my business inside and out, convinced me this is the company I want to do business with," Jinks said. "I figured if they were willing to spend that much time and effort up front to treat me like a partner, rather than someone to sell a product to, I decided they were the company I wanted to work with," he said. "They did a lot more of that than any of the other vendors." "Most companies send a salesman who just tries to sell you their product," he added. "Blue Ocean took the time and effort to learn my business." "And once they started, they were 'Johnny on the spot," Jinks remarked.

Jinks noted that Blue Ocean's team worked closely with Mason Road to make the transition as smooth and error free as possible. "Of course, there were a few burps at first," Jinks acknowledged, "trying to figure out how to configure everything to our needs." "But those glitches we did encounter were not systemic, but primarily due to the fact that we were different than anything they've ever done," Jinks explained. "As I said, we're not a true manufacturing operation, being more construction and fabrication, as compared to true manufacturing operation."

"It may have taken them a little while to get my process figured out, but they did it," he said. "I kept wanting to add in some oddball thing that was unique to my business, but they said they could make it work, and they did."

Jinks said Mason Road and Blue Ocean started the project in April of this

year, and the system went live on September 1 -- a five month process from start to finish." "We probably could have gone live two months earlier," Jinks said, "but we ran at least a month's worth of trials to make sure everything was as we wanted it to be."

So from a simple accounting system, Mason Street Sheet Metal went to a complete SAP package using SAP Business One be.as, including accounting, inventory, job processing, deliveries, and "tying it all back to invoices and receivables," Jinks said.

"We now track our entire system from raw materials through to the finished product and delivery of goods," Jinks said, "controlling the entire company with one package instead of four different programs."

And how are things almost three months after going live?

"We've had no problems since we went live, and if we have any questions or concerns, or 'tweaks' we'd like to do, we email Blue Ocean, and more often than not within five minutes we get a response, either

an answer or a notification they're already working on it," Jinks said. "Their support staff is great," Jinks added. "It's definitely something we don't have to worry about if we have a problem or question." Jinks observed that "unlike many companies, where the salesmen push the product and then you find there's no support at the other end after you send the check, Blue Ocean is right there with the support."

"They've been here for everything I've wanted to do, even when it was something out of the ordinary," Jinks said, noting that while "I would like to see SAP have a better 'off-the-shelf' control project module, Blue Ocean was right there to add in custom features for us as needed."

"You want to try to keep your operating system as close to 'out of the box' as you can," Jinks said, "but even when it can't be, Blue Ocean can come in and twist and tweak it to make it fill our needs."

"It's been a real pleasure working with Blue Ocean," Jinks concluded. "I'm on the phone with them about every other day talking, and they respond, sometimes even overnight on fixing the little bugs." "It's an ongoing relationship," Jinks said, "and I know it will stay that way." ●

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