



IN-HOUSE DEVELOPMENT

Every processor is different, so how can a company make sure all its unique needs are met by management software? One Mid-Atlantic firm found success by building the technology internally.

By Chris Hansen

As the electronics recycling and reuse landscape evolves, processing companies of all sizes are seeing a greater need for computing tools that allow them to seamlessly track and leverage all of the material and information flowing through their businesses.

At C2 Management, for instance, what separates us from our competition is the fact we handle a wide spectrum of industrial equipment, not just IT assets. But that reality also creates the biggest issues when it comes to business management.

Because we have an extremely diverse client base, the types of management software that have typically been used in our industry are not the most efficient for us. At different times we have used Excel, Word, Google and the many types of eBay software.

Ultimately, we determined we needed a software that could seamlessly account for large volumes of unique industrial and IT assets together. Further, from an efficiency standpoint, we wanted just one portal access that could serve all employees. And we wanted to track sales and commissions, multiple locations, and have automatic com-

munications with profit-sharing partners.

In 2006, we decided to invest in developing our own business management software, a program that came to be known as ListApp. The process was full of twists and turns, and the software has seen a number of substantial updates. But we did end up with a product that is the right fit for our business. In fact, it has been instrumental in guiding the ways C2 has grown.

STARTING WITH HELP FROM THE OUTSIDE

Allocating money to develop this kind of project when other “acceptable” solutions are available is tough for a small company, so we started out by outsourcing the project to a small group for not that much money. This was a mistake, however. While the team we hired was talented, the resources we were willing to throw at the initiative early on ensured “small fish” treatment, and the project did not progress as quickly as we had hoped.

ListApp 1.0, the result of that 2006 attempt, could keep track of loads and sales, as well as important financial details, but it was still

more of a basic software solution. Nonetheless, the experience did make clear that developing this software was something we really wanted to do, and this understanding gave us the confidence to monetarily prioritize it.

In 2008, we hired a full-time developer at C2, with the goal of delivering ListApp 2.0. That iteration of the software was successful in that it gave us the ability to track recycling along with more client-based tracking abilities. However, investing in this program was still a hardship for us as a small company, and the biggest mistake we made during this almost three-year period of development was that we didn't make time to understand exactly what was going on with the software. We were growing extremely quickly at this point and were not staying real-time educated regarding research and advancements. That left us devastated when our developer moved on to greener pastures.

Developing a working product that accounted for everything we were asking it to do was always going to be a long-term project, and the fact that our software worked with eBay somewhat acceptably made advancing our project less of a priority for a while.

But, eventually, annual double-digit growth and increasingly diverse partnerships that required the handling of a wide range of assets pushed us to revive the initiative. In 2017, ListApp 3.0 was born.

The knowledge gained from mistakes made during an almost 10-year beta trial of our own product proved invaluable. As we moved ahead with the revamp, our leadership team put a clear focus on rightsizing management and resources tied to the effort. Setting goals and charting progress in regular meetings became standard. Excitement grew at the prospect of having a product that could really do it all for us.

Version 3.0 is a much more robust and well-coded software that is responsive and completely integrated.

FAR MORE THAN JUST MANAGING ASSETS

ListApp 3.0, in its third year of use, is the company tool we dreamed of having 15 years ago.

First, it can seamlessly accommodate requirements that differ from client to client. We can easily track different metrics based on client needs while prioritizing reuse across a large spectrum of assets. Everything is barcoded by customer, and we can deliver a real-time financial report for any client we have. Internally, we can generate statistics on profitability by client, salesperson or dates at the press of a button.

In addition, inventory lists are easy to work with, and because it knows exactly what was received, destroyed, and sold, ListApp 3.0 can automatically create client certificates of recycling/destruction. Built-in guides for testing have made employee training easier and allowed seasoned employees to focus on increases in volume.

And, lastly, the software has allowed us to achieve our goals of having one portal for all employees.

The benefits of the software have extended beyond just boosted efficiency internally. The volumes C2 deals with outside of IT assets have continued to grow, which has expanded our relationships with other recy-

clers. The reports that ListApp 3.0 generates for our partners have drawn attention, essentially acting as a tool that makes us a more valuable partner company.

Further, C2 is planning expansions to multiple locations around the Washington, D.C. region, thanks to our growing number of relationships with data centers and Fortune 500 clients. ListApp 3.0 will be able to manage all these locations. The corporate feedback regarding security and organizational aspects of the software have been overwhelmingly positive, and we regularly query our customer base for what we can improve. The idea that this software we have developed has in some respects become a template for company expansion is very rewarding.

In fact, our recent move into a new 100,000 square foot headquarters building (in Berryville, Va.) has been aided by things we have learned from our 2.0 software version and incorporated in ListApp 3.0. The efficiency we were able to gain with respect to triage alone has allowed us more room for deliveries and sped up the timetable with which we can schedule them. In other words, the floor plan we have designed was influenced by reporting from the software. Today, we are able to process quicker and in a smaller space – these are some of the first examples of the investment we have made in this software starting to directly affect our bottom line.

With these improved efficiencies comes the inevitable need for more employees and our software has been able to help us pinpoint where we need more help, and in some cases, where we can develop new profit centers. For instance, the ability of ListApp 3.0 to regulate sales anywhere, not just on eBay, has assisted our understanding of exactly what we make for ourselves and our partners on medical and lab equipment. This information has justified outreach to other recyclers and organizations that may need help with this.

EXTENDING THE TOOL TO OTHERS

We are now considering the possibility of ListApp 3.0 itself being a profit center, by selling the software to other organizations. While this was not originally part of the plan for this project, the feedback we have gotten regarding its potential for many types of users is interesting. Since it was essentially designed to accommodate a broad range of resources, thrift shops, auction houses and liquidators could all possibly make use of the technology.

And if we were to market ListApp 3.0 to third parties, the most obvious customer would be others within our own industry, which would of course include competitors. We have always been strong believers in the concept of collaboration leading to profits. C2 is a member of

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The staff of C2 Management outside the company's new headquarters in Berryville, Va. The company's business management software provided important insights on how to best design and staff the site.

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as many industry-related associations as we can be, and we participate so that we can learn what others are doing. But we are also happy to share our best practices with others. The better we all do, the better the industry will do as a whole. We are happy to talk about what we have developed and offer help to others trying to do the same.

What started out for us as a processing tool has become so much more. It truly has shaped the way we think as a company and affected almost every aspect of our decision-making processes. Assessing what it does for us now and what we believe it will be able to do in the future, it is hard to believe that we questioned moving forward with the project at times.

The recycling industry and circular economy are really still in their infancy throughout the world, and far-reaching changes will be happening rapidly. Software that can stay abreast of and accommodate these advancements will ultimately better the planet.

To that end, we are committed to being on the forefront of this movement, and we certainly envision a day when ListApp 4.0 becomes a necessary reality. ESN

Chris Hansen is the CEO of C2 Management, which he started with his wife, Sharon, in the late 1990s. Since then, the company has sold assets to 200,000 unique buyers, and it recently moved into a 100,000-square-foot headquarters in Virginia. Hansen can be contacted at chansen@tryc2.com.