

## Case Study: Property Management Provider

IW Commercial, is a company engaged in business of supplying specialized property management services to many of the largest commercial property owners in the United States. The company is headquartered in San Francisco, California, but has staff in several major West Coast markets. With over a dozen office buildings under contract there are hundreds of tenants to be cared for. They faced a challenge that is typical of such firms: Find a way to simply, easily, and economically find a way to support a process of continuous improvement for their property management services.

When they began the search for methods and tools most of what they found was either complex or expensive or both. Both the cost and complexity showed up in the price of technology, cost of training and implementation, and the ongoing cost of maintenance. In some cases the tools were complete with their own application, data store, and methodology. In other cases there was only an application that relied upon a separately licensed data base engine. Frequently some special group-ware platform was required. No matter where they turned, it seemed someone would have to be dedicated to the chore of project management, or problem management, or work group administration, or . . . .

Then they discovered AIRS for Property Managers from InterWorks Software, Inc. The AIRS application service is available for use so that only authorized users could use the application in support of their business. With about 300 tenants, they figured that the fees came to approximately \$30 per tenant per year. By saving one person-hour per year per tenant, the service pays for itself. After a quick walk through demonstration, a little time poking around under the covers of the on-line service, and discussion about implementation approaches, they decided to sign up for the service.

Continuous service improvement while reducing costs is an ambitious undertaking. Yet it is essential in today's service oriented marketplace. Property managers find themselves squeezed between the demands for profitability by property owners and services by tenants. The inefficiencies of traditional (even recent tradition) are becoming targets for change. Telephone tag, lost faxes, confused and fragmented conversations all lead to misunderstandings, wasted time, and frustration for everyone. As each property manager is pressed to deal with more and more tenants and each tenant clamoring for more service the situation can quickly and easily get out of hand.

Using the features of AIRS, IW's property management team was able to simplify record keeping, accelerate communication, and improve quality almost immediately. Their approach was thoughtful but simple. Their focus for use of AIRS was on ***accelerating the completion of current tasks*** rather than on more strategic planning, scheduling, and management chores. Experience had shown them how easy it was to get caught up in the processes of classical project management and lose sight of survival.

Once they acquired their administrative access to AIRS, they set about defining all the players and their first set of projects. They chose to equate a project to a property. Since they have a separate accountability for each of the buildings they serve, that was a convenient choice. From there they established the authority matrix for every member of the team, whether or not IW employed them. The ability to define interested parties outside IW was key since many of the activities related to each property involved a broad range of service providers from locksmiths to landscaping companies to technology providers and telecom providers. Now, based on their authority, interested parties can create, or view, or change, or report on any of the projects and/or tasks to which they are a party. They merely use their browser, supply their userid and password to gain access to the information - from where ever they are, whenever they want. Then, whenever the content of an Action Item is changed, an email notice is sent to all parties concerned.

In practice, their processes generally follow this example:

#### Background

For each property, the property manager is in the market area. The customer service team is in San Francisco, CA. The operations manager is in Hayward, CA.

#### Scenario

A tenant arrives at the office in the morning only to find that the office roof is leaking near their file server. The tenant representative (office manager) goes to AIRS, logs in, goes to the property area and adds a new Action Item. He supplies a brief description of the problem, a long description of the problem and as much commentary as necessary. If necessary a file can be uploaded and attached to the Action Item (this can be useful in working on billing problems). As soon as he closes the new Action Item, an email notice is sent to parties to be alerted of new Action Items for the property. This includes the operations manager and the customer service manager. The customer service manager and the operations manager both have the authority to allocate the "emergency" to a member of the service team. In this case it would be the contracted roofing contractor. Note: the email notices can be sent to an ordinary email address, to an email addressable pager, or cell phone.

When either manager receives the alert email, the manager sees the entire content of the report in the text of the mail message. Then the manager opens a browser window to assign someone to deal with the new Action Item. This can occur in just minutes. Once the Action Item is assigned, the team member to whom it is assigned joins the list of parties with an interest in the Action Item. When the Action Item update is complete, all the members of the list of interested parties receive an alert email. So the originator of the Action Item is kept advised of all changes to its status. This keeps everyone informed and eliminates the opportunity for things to fall between the cracks. Again, this regularly happens within just a few minutes without any telephone tag, post-it notes getting lost, or 3x5 cards behind the water cooler.

An important development that has occurred with the use of AIRS is that everyone pays more attention to their email messages. One of the property managers went so far as to write an email script that gets invoked when an email message shows up that has "water" and "leak" in the body of the message. The script plays a very attention getting sound file. Imagination! But, once a property manager is advised of an Action Item, they can assign the actual service staff that has everything needed to take action in response to the request. When the assignment is made, the service staff (internal or contracted) is notified via an email alert. When action is taken to repair the problem, the staff member notes it in the AIRS Action Item - often this can be done at the site of the repair. All interested parties are immediately notified of the change to the Action Item and can take whatever next steps are necessary.

The key is that automatic notification and activity logging are an *incidental consequence* of merely recording current activities. This data is then available for analysis to support more effective resource planning in future projects.

Experience has shown repeatedly that complex project management programs and procedures almost always normalize themselves to "to do lists". Some are fancy, most are simple spreadsheets or outlines. But, in the final analysis, getting the work done *properly, promptly, and thoroughly* is what makes the difference between creating value and creating overhead.

This is but one example of how AIRS can be put to use quickly and productively in a typical property management organization. Like the crazy sound in the property manager's email script, there is an infinite number of ways that business leaders seeking to improve productivity can use AIRS to help accomplish that goal.

To find out more about AIRS, visit the web site at:

<http://www.interworkssoftware.com>

and look for the link to AIRS.