



Software That Covers All the Bases



Three Rivers Park District Hits a Grand Slam with Vermont Systems

Facility-wide software solution improves customer service and streamlines operations

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When Dick Keifer, technology manager for the Three Rivers Park District near Minneapolis, set out to replace the district’s cash receipt system two years ago, he never imagined that today he would be the proud manager of a comprehensive software solution that has elevated virtually all business functions—from transactions at field facilities to back office processing—to new levels of efficiency.

“In looking at cash receipts solutions I came across Vermont Systems,” Keifer explained, “and as we were talking about the cash receipt system, they opened my eyes to a much bigger picture where we could replace our home-grown systems for a cost within our budget.”

Outgrowing Home-Grown Solutions

The Three Rivers Park District, commonly known as the Hennepin Regional Park District, encompasses facilities in six counties spread over 50 square miles. The district’s amenities include 33 major parks, consisting of nature preserves, campgrounds, ski areas, golf courses, and nature centers. More than two million visitors are recorded each year.

“Our facilities grew over the years, as did the number of visitors,” Keifer said. “However, our computer systems, which consisted mostly of home-grown applications that dated back to the late seventies and early eighties, really weren’t providing the level of customer service we wanted to provide. For example, we couldn’t even complete credit card transactions on site.”

Keifer oversees a six-person IT department with an annual budget of about one million dollars. Once Keifer saw the possibilities Vermont Systems offered to his district, he took his time and carefully conducted due diligence. Keifer knew that such a large project required the buy-in of management and other personnel across the organization.

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“Getting the buy-in of management and gaining end-user support was critical to our success,” Keifer said. “We went over every aspect of the system together and made sure of what we were doing before we leapt.”

An Aggressive Rollout Schedule

Keifer budgeted \$500,000 for the project, and in March of 2001 put together an aggressive nine-month rollout schedule. The district purchased five software modules, including specialized modules for golf course management, maintenance, and Web-based order processing.

Through the remainder of 2001, the district replaced its legacy systems, installing point-of-sale systems at 23 locations, and connecting 32 park locations with state-of-the-art features such as touch screens for data entry, programmable keyboards, and hand-held scanners for inventory control. T1 lines connect the district's facilities to a central server.

“A contributing factor to the success of our installation is the system's ease of use,” Keifer said. “We have a number of employees who have been with us for many years and had no experience beyond our legacy applications. The transition to Vermont Systems was very easy for most.”

Better Customer Service

Installed about one year now, the Three Rivers District has seen great improvement in many areas, including customer service, account reconciliation, faster and more accurate transaction processing, and the ability to put more effective recreation programs in place.

“From a customer service standpoint we are now providing faster service, more accurate service, and levels of service we could never provide before,” Keifer said. “We definitely have many more satisfied customers, which is why we are here in the first place.”

From the standpoint of efficiency in business processes, the district is now able to complete its processing needs with six employees, instead of the nine that were required with the old system. And as Keifer noted, the books are now balanced with much greater accuracy.

“The balancing of cash to our ledgers is much faster and much more accurate,” Keifer said. “The system generates excellent management reports on demand, giving our managers much better decision-making information.”

A Centralized Database

Installed only one year, the system's database is just now getting populated to the point where trends can be analyzed—trends that will help the district better provide programs its constituency wants.

“We've already made some program changes due to the attendance data we are now able to gather,” Keifer said. “We can track response to programs—what days of the week and what times work best for example. We can track hourly usage and monitor a person's use of the facilities to plan marketing programs around individual preferences. In the next two to three years, as the database grows, that information will be invaluable in our ability to provide the best customer programs and services.”

On-Line Transactions Prove Successful

The district rolled out its Web-based transaction-processing module in September of 2002. Keifer said response to the system was beyond anyone's expectations.

“We rolled out the system just in time for ski lesson registration, one of our most popular programs,” Keifer said. “In the first ten days alone we processed more than \$320,000 of registrations—we have never seen volume like that before.”

Keifer said that the district is just getting up to speed with its maintenance applications, but is already enjoying more efficient scheduling and use of maintenance resources. When looking at the bigger picture, Keifer likes what he sees.

“Vermont Systems is helping us become a better manager of our resources,” Keifer said. “We have a responsibility to the public to provide the best programs in the most efficient manner possible, and Vermont Systems is helping us do that.”



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