

For Virtual CIO and IT Support, JJ Bender Turns to Ash Creek Enterprises

The Challenge: Keeping the Focus on Customers, Not on IT

JJ Bender is a market leader in the office automation equipment industry and specializes in digital press and high-volume printing equipment. The company's customers and vendors always come first.

That being said, there is little to no time to plan IT strategy and provide on-going support for employees users. JJ Bender would rather put its resources towards customers, but at the same time, make sure systems and applications stay up-and-running at all times—while also streamlining business processes and customer communications.

"If one employee system or the entire IT network is down, our business operations suffer and we can't provide customers with the level of

service they deserve," said Hollis Bufferd, the Chief of Staff for JJ Bender, who has worked for the company for the past 11 years. "Given that we prefer not to assign internal resources to IT, we need to work with a partner who can ensure we use technologies that make sense for our business and keep all of our employees functioning at full capacity."

To take on this challenge, JJ Bender wanted to identify a partner with expertise across the entire IT infrastructure—servers, networking, wireless and phones—as well as employee systems, including hardware and applications. "Essentially, we need to work with someone who can serve as our IT department and be as dedicated to helping our company succeed as we are," said Bufferd.

"Partnering with Ash Creek is much more cost-effective than trying to provision and manage IT in-house. It's impossible to hire and retain someone with all the technical skills Ash Creek offers across its entire team, and hiring multiple people would be cost-prohibitive. And we know that if any problems come up, Ash Creek will solve things quickly."

Hollis Bufferd,
Chief of Staff for JJ Bender

The Solution: Ash Creek's Wide Range of Technical Expertise

JJ Bender found the answer to its challenge in 2004, and the partnership with Ash Creek Enterprises has flourished ever since. During the last 12 years, Ash Creek has served as a "Virtual CIO" for JJ Bender by providing a team that delivers on-going remote and on-site technical support as well as quarterly technology consulting.

In addition to monitoring to make sure employee systems, servers and networking devices work optimally, Ash Creek recommends and advises on new technologies and system migrations that JJ Bender should consider to enhance business-process efficiencies. Ash Creek also takes care of all software license renewals and hardware maintenance contracts as well as procuring new hardware and software when needed.

"In addition to their technical expertise across all the systems we use, a key attribute that Ash Creek brings to the table is their ability to discuss technology issues in non-technical terms," said Bufferd. "They help us understand the business value of new technologies and upgrades, and when technical issues arise, they clearly communicate the impact on the business."

Every few years, JJ Bender performs a review of the relationship with Ash Creek and considers if a change to another IT partner is warranted, but the consistent performance delivered by the Ash Creek team has prompted Bufferd to stick with a partnership that continues to work well. She also expanded the relationship to have Ash Creek provide similar support services to an affiliated company in New York City.

The Results: IT Support That's Always There—at a Predictable Cost

Ash Creek continuously looks for new ways to enhance the services it provides to JJ Bender and for new technologies that can help the business operate more efficiently. Recent projects include migrating the company to a new VoIP phone system as well as adding on real-time help desk support from the Ash Creek 24x7 network operations center.

"When we need technical support, we still have the option to call, but we can now also engage the Ash Creek help desk simply by opening up an instant messaging chat session," Bufferd explained. "This enables any of our employees to receive real-time support right when they need it—rather than waiting on hold or for a call back when it may no longer be convenient."

With Ash Creek having the ability to take over control of devices remotely, the help desk team typically resolves issues right away, and they also recognize when it's time to escalate issues to senior personnel. "The help desk does a great job handling the pressure of distressed employees and getting them back online as quickly as possible," Bufferd pointed out.

In addition to providing expertise and support on hardware, Microsoft Windows and Microsoft Office applications, Ash Creek also plays a key role when issues arise with the enterprise ERP and CRM applications that JJ Bender relies on. "It's sometimes difficult to know whether an application, the device or the network is causing an issue," Bufferd said. "But Ash Creek always jumps in and serves as our liaison when we need to interact with one of our software vendors to bring issues to a close."

By partnering with Ash Creek, JJ Bender benefits from predictable costs for all of its on-going IT needs. And if a new technology deployment becomes necessary, Ash Creek typically gives plenty of advance warning so JJ Bender can work the expense into its budget. Looking ahead, Bufferd is now considering moving the company's Microsoft Office applications and email to the cloud—utilizing Office 365.

"Determining if and when moving applications to the cloud can be a tricky decision," Bufferd said. "But Ash Creek is working with us closely to help us decide, and we know they can support us if we do move to the cloud."

This presents a great example of the Ash Creek approach—to not push any particular technology but rather collaborate with customers to do what makes the most sense from a business standpoint.

"That's part of what makes them such a great partner and show how they try to build long-standing relationships," Bufferd concluded. "They are always there for us when we need them, and they always work to come up with solutions backed by exceptional service that makes them feel like a member of our team."



About JJ Bender

JJ Bender, located in Connecticut, has over 35 years of experience as a market leader in the office automation equipment industry—specializing in digital press and high-volume printing equipment. With no obligations to outside manufacturers, JJ Bender offers the printing community a unique shopping experience where customers have the freedom to explore multiple brands and ultimately choose the equipment that works best for their business.