

Customer Case Study: Roebbelen Contracting, Inc.



Standardizing on Prolog® Helps Roebbelen Contracting Boost Revenue, Retain Customers and Achieve ISO 9000 Certification

Roebbelen Contracting, Inc. is a general contractor specializing in commercial, institutional and industrial projects. Founded in 1959, the Sacramento, California-based company also offers construction management, design build and value analysis services to customers throughout California, Nevada, Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Utah. Roebbelen was named as the 2005 Contractor of the Year – Large Category in the Sacramento region by the American Subcontractors Association and is ranked #193 on ENR's 2006 Top 400 Contractors list.



Establishing Business Standards

In 1999, Roebbelen Contracting, Inc. challenged itself to obtain ISO 9000 certification by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), an achievement that would recognize the company's compliance with stringent business processes and customer quality standards. The effort sparked a comprehensive review of existing processes with the aim of boosting efficiency, lowering costs and passing savings on to customers.

During that review, Roebbelen identified the need for a tool that would streamline operations by providing standardization throughout the organization. Prolog Manager, comprehensive project management software developed by Meridian Systems, was chosen, and would soon be viewed as a critical element in achieving and maintaining ISO 9000 certification.

Roebbelen's successful implementation of Prolog is attributed to enthusiasm among key employees and a savvy plan for getting past the predictable resistance to change. The company's methodical approach centered on training key employees first and then relying on them to evangelize the system's benefits to the rest of their divisions.

Custom programming was used to develop a search engine within Prolog that mirrored an existing tool that Roebbelen deemed vital to operations. "As the Alliance partner for SBC/AT&T, we perform work in approximately 1100 properties and need to track projects for each property by project manager, address, type of work and work order number," explains Ken DeBruhl, Roebbelen's COO. "We provided Meridian with our criteria and they upgraded Prolog to meet our specifications."

Prolog has helped Roebbelen realize its goal of unifying business processes across the enterprise. Establishing consistent reporting procedures, allowing better measurement of cycle times to identify areas for improvement and monitoring project milestones are just some ways the software has made an impact. "Prolog has helped us deliver consistent, reliable and timely project data to owners and architects,

which allows us to solve problems proactively," says DeBruhl. "In addition to helping meet ISO 9000 standards, this helps build enduring relationships with our customers and leads to repeat business."

Workforce Efficiency

Roebbelen used Prolog to shift from spreadsheet and single-user documentation to centralized access of project management details from a single database. With this access, managers can drill down to detailed information on items such as submittals, RFIs, change orders, progress billings and preconstruction documents. Big-picture views of performance, such as which division has the lowest percentage of change orders, is also readily available.

According to Information System Manager, John Breidenbach, "Prolog has delivered improved data intelligence and better productivity, which has helped push revenues ahead of quarterly projections for 2006. By standardizing on Prolog, we have been able to increase our revenue without increasing support staff."

Project managers work more efficiently using Prolog, as do field support staff and superintendents, who use the system to enter daily work journal entries. "All project correspondence is now captured within Prolog," Breidenbach says, "which gives managers instant access to what's happening on the job." And when things are not going according to plan, Prolog sounds the alert. "With Prolog, we can determine if the project manager, owner or architect is causing delays," DeBruhl adds. "That lets us resolve issues early, before they become costly."

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Information System Manager
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Integration Provides Process Improvement

The program's flexibility has allowed Roebbelen to create customized reports to meet in-house and client needs. "Prolog takes reporting to the next level by sending out the information that's needed to the people who want it," Breidenbach says. "The system has really become the main information source for this company."

Integration between Prolog and Roebbelen's other business systems is part of its grand plan for continued process improvement. One example of this is the company's insurance tracking. Roebbelen's insurance auditor uses Prolog to track insurance policies and automatically notify project managers of approaching expiration dates. "We have greatly limited our exposure because of this capability," Breidenbach stresses.

The integration of Prolog with the company's Sage Timberline accounting system (currently underway) may present the biggest opportunity for improvement. This link will establish regular data exchanges between the two systems, improving how the company tracks costs, calculates estimates and generates productivity reports.

Integration takes time to complete, says Breidenbach, but the payoff is worth the wait, particularly in labor savings. Contract management had previously required hiring administrators to do contract verification and validation. With the task simplified through Prolog, project managers and engineers now handle this responsibility. "We haven't hired a contract administrator in that capacity since 2003," he adds.

Roebbelen Contracting, Inc. Project Profile

Whitney High School in Rocklin, California

Rocklin, California has exhibited phenomenal growth in the housing market. Because of this, the city was struggling to accommodate the ever increasing numbers of students in its education facilities. That's why the construction of Whitney High School was a rush from day one.

Named for Joel Parker Whitney, the city's founding father, the school's site was identified, selected and approved before the land was even annexed to the city, and started six months before grading of local streets began.

Key Project Elements

- 210,000 square feet on 50 acres with a capacity of 2,400
- 500-seat performing arts center with full fly tower and lighting/rigging
- Library & resource center
- Sports complex with all weather track and seating for 5,000
- Teacher planning centers
- Culinary arts instruction facilities
- Science and technology classrooms, including television broadcasting facilities

Contract value: Just over \$64M

Project completion date: January 2006

Customer Retention through Change Order Management

The standardization and project control provided by Prolog also saves money for Roebbelen's customers. "We now have a measure for change orders per million dollars of work," explains Breidenbach, who credits Prolog with helping reduce change order rates for most divisions. Since 2003, one division has dropped its average change order rate from nine percent to five percent. Another area reduced its average from five percent to one percent.

While some contractors seek to generate change order revenue, Roebbelen avoids making change orders part of its profit stream. This allows customers to stay within their budgets. That's a big selling point with customers such as school districts, that are limited by tight government spending and bond measures. "It's really made us one of the favorite contractors among the region's school districts," Breidenbach states.

Prolog also enables Roebbelen to show customers – in hard numbers – how improved change order management saves them money. "That's a huge, huge benefit," Breidenbach says, "and it's spawned a lot of repeat business."



Results

Whitney High School was completed in just 14 months. This state-of-the-art facility offers a wide range of instructional opportunities and the open layout promotes a sense of community. Students have access to the most current library and media resources, a technology center and an excellent performing arts program with theater. In addition, the school boasts shops, music and even a culinary arts program.

Project Award

- Western Council of Construction Consumers – Distinguished Project Award



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