



CASE STUDY

Bob's Discount Furniture Outfits HR with Workflow

Challenge	HR notices were handled via slow, paper-based communication causing delays and overstuffed mailboxes
Solution	Captaris Workflow enables managers to submit forms online and delivers automated notices to executives
Results	Turnaround cut drastically—from weeks to days. Executives save time. Employees receive raises immediately

BACKGROUND

Bob's Discount Furniture, headquartered in Manchester, Conn., is ranked among the top 40 furniture retailers in the United States. It manages 20 locations across the Northeast, including 1,200 employees and an online store at www.mybobs.com.

THE CHALLENGE

One visit to the Bob's Discount Furniture Web site provides insight into its corporate culture. After browsing catalog pages and location maps, visitors can play Space Invaders and Hangman or review the company's history summarized in three words, motorcycles and waterbeds. (Bob Kaufman, the founder, recounts how his motorcycle accident and doctor's recommendation for recuperation led directly to the creation of the furniture outlet.)

Growing from the time the first store opened in 1990, Bob's attributes its success to its company culture, knowledge of the marketplace and—most importantly—its staff. A strong commitment to Bob's employees drives company efforts to ensure staff members have useful tools and are rewarded for jobs well done. In this area, Bob's recognized the need for elimination of critical, paper-based processes starting with its HR system for payroll status changes.

When an employee retires, transfers to another location or receives a raise, several departments must be notified and appropriate action must be taken.

- Following reviews, managers across 20 locations mail change-status-forms to the payroll department at headquarters.
- A payroll specialist processes the forms and delivers them to the chief operating officer (COO) for approval.
- The COO authorizes changes, which then take affect in the next paycheck.

Unfortunately, since the system relied on paper and postal pick-ups, the "next paycheck" often proved to be weeks in coming. "It would sit on someone's desk for a week, then get transported to Manchester where it would wait in mailboxes before the appropriate people got them," explained Roxann Lane, information specialist, Bob's Discount Furniture. Due to the time and paper-shuffling required to handle forms, the payroll specialist entered status changes on a weekly basis. The stacks would then make it to the COO's desk—often 50 papers at a time—for signature. "If you received a raise on the 10th, it could be the 24th before you actually saw it."

While paper-based processes were slow and unreliable, other HR-related communication, such as notification of personnel changes, lacked a formalized system altogether. Such a situation can pose security issues if terminated employees retain access to computers before all departments are notified. In all, Bob's knew it needed an electronic workflow solution to enhance HR processes and set a course for business automation overall.

THE SOLUTION

Choosing a workflow solution proved to be similar to selecting the perfect couch. You know what you need. It's just a matter of finding it. To fit its network environment and IT strategy, Bob's turned to an industry leader. "(Captaris Workflow, formerly Teemplate for .NET) just had, feature by feature, almost everything we were looking for," said Paul Dinoia, systems engineer with Bob's. "It integrates with Windows, is based on .NET technology and provides email integration." Since its users are accustomed to Microsoft products, Dinoia said the design of Captaris Workflow provided a smooth transition.

Paper processes that previously took weeks are now completed electronically within a couple of days.

THE SOLUTION

"We use the same trail as before, but now it is electronic and automated," Lane said. For instance, using Captaris Workflow, managers fill out payroll change-status-forms online. A notice is immediately delivered to the payroll specialist via email who preps the forms for COO approval—all usually within the same day. Notifications of personnel changes are also sent via emails distributed automatically based on a pre-set list. By avoiding processes that rely on paper forms and hand-delivered mail, business tasks are kept on track rather than stalemated in overstuffed mailboxes. "One of the big benefits of Workflow is putting in place a process for notification and other tasks that are not contingent on one person picking up the mail," Lane explained.

The Company plans to extend Workflow capabilities to all store locations managing virtually all communication. "Once we convert all forms for all correspondence we will likely see significant cost savings," Lane said. Among the processes tagged for automation: vacation requests, mileage reimbursement and other business HR forms.

THE RESULTS

- Paper processes that previously took weeks are now completed electronically within days.
- Information is centrally updated and managed ensuring forms and reporting are consistent across all stores.
- Members of the payroll department and the COO save hours every week by handling emails as they are delivered rather than stacks of papers that have accumulated over several days. These employees are then able to focus on other business-critical tasks.
- Employees are pleased to receive pay raises immediately. Rewards are more quickly linked to work performance encouraging positive employer-employee relations.
- Retail logins are automatically pulled with an employee termination. The computer system and stores stay secure.
- Future integration of Business Activity Monitoring is expected to maintain history for efficient management.

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