

eZigma IT Consulting

Your Hassle Free IT Care Provider

CASE STUDY REGIONAL HOME BUILDER

Client Case Studies

The Client: MHI

Quality products, customer satisfaction and community respect are among the hallmarks of McGuyer Homebuilders Inc. Their construction and sales of more 30,000 homes in east Texas since 1988 is ample testament to the company's commitment to achieving those goals.

But sometimes business infrastructures can become misaligned with the operational demands of a successful organization – and become very costly. When that happens, the impact can be felt among customers and employees -- and even on management's nerves.

Nearly four years ago, McGuyer Homebuilders, MHI, faced such a challenge, and company executives knew that realigning IT resources could be both costly and risky.

With a corporate motto that MHI is "The mark of integrity," adding further risk to the residential construction business was not an appealing option for company executives.

The IT challenges faced by this "Top 30" U.S. homebuilder were considerable.

The Problem:

Business Requirements

McGuyer builds its housing products under four brands: Carmel, Coventry, Plantation and Pioneer. It markets several of those brands in each of five Texas cities: Austin, Dallas, Ft. Worth, Houston and San Antonio. Therefore the company's IT Department must support Sales and Marketing activities for 17 residential developments, plus corporate headquarters, in a broad swath of east Texas that stretches up to 270 miles from point to point.

To drive sales, McGuyer uses a well-trained and highly successful Sales and Marketing team of more than 200 representatives, who rely on their computer connections to help generate more than \$600 million in annual property sales.

At the average sale office among those 17 projects, the loss of a single home sale can wipe out upwards to \$50,000 in gross margins for McGuyer. Multiply that by several losses in a weekend of non-functional computers – which are critical to concluding sales agreements -- and the results can quickly dig a big hole in corporate profits.

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Networking Environment

To achieve this high sales volume, the Sales and Marketing staff conducts much of its work during the non-traditional business hours -- weekday afternoons and evenings, holidays and weekends.

In contrast to the customer-facing portion of the business, McGuyer relies on a nine-to-five IT Department of five techs and a director to manage and maintain its computer network.

The disconnect between the Sales and Marketing's needs and IT's hours of operations are obvious and fundamental. To fill the off-hours void, MHI's geographically dispersed operations relied on a variety of ad hoc contractors to solve urgent computer and network problems.

The result was an inefficient deployment of resources, unreliable service levels, uneven billing rates, and difficulty in anticipating and controlling costs.

The Solution:

Continued success in the robust Texas new-homes market demanded that MHI gain control of its network, and the costs associated with it.

The objectives -- among 200 users at 150 points of presence --were to:

- Satisfy the practical requirements of the Sales and Marketing team;
- Maintain uninterrupted business flow;
- Gain greater control over costs;
- Improve IT performance and efficiency;
- Standardize systems and applications.

MHI also wanted their internal IT Department to remain in place and become the integration and performance control point for all external services.

After listening to pitches from in-place suppliers, MHI chose to engage a new team: eZigma. In doing so it would utilize in a three-step vetting process. Successful completion of each step would allow eZigma to progress to the next level. The three phases were:

- A three-month trial period would provide MHI with time to examine eZigma's procedures, technical knowledge, responsiveness, and ability to work effectively with the corporate infrastructure and IT staff.
- A 12-month contract would test the potential for a long-term relationship between eZigma and MHI, and test further eZigma's ability to provide innovative and cost-conscious solutions, and assess its ability to fit into the MHI culture.
- The highest level would be the long-term continuing relationship that would make eZigma a strategic part of MHI's business operations.

Executing the Solution:

In executing the solution, MHI's IT department was the relationship manager. The various local service supplier relationships were severed. eZigma's presence became transparent to the Sales and Marketing team except that their services filled the service nights, weekends and holidays needs when IT was off duty.

The three-month trial engagement was successful, and eZigma was contracted for a full year's service.

With this more prominent role at MHI, eZigma was able to view the network situation from a long-term operational perspective, not simply as a tactical break/fix remedy. As a result, eZigma recommended a program of improvement, which was reviewed and approved by the IT Department, and then adopted by senior management.

The proposed deployment would embrace all operating locations in the company's five cities. The infrastructure was designed to be highly functional, service-efficient and cost-effective. It included the following elements.

- Centralize IT control and create a Citrix server-based Houston Data Center.

- Replace the random collection of PCs at each of 150 locations with a network of flat panel client monitors as well as new pointing devices and keyboards.
- Install Dell network printers.
- Replace dial-up DSL.
- Provide Sprint and Verizon wireless data card connectivity for notebook computers, enabling direct Data Center access.
- Execute the entire deployment with eZigma and MHI technicians functioning as a single technology team.

The New Service Environment

With eZigma on board, the IT Department could concentrate on serving the growing needs of corporate headquarters while managing the integrated MHI-eZigma Help Desk, which became the fulcrum to ensure that data communications resources were in balance with field needs.

Critical to achieving that balance was seamless integration of corporate IT and eZigma services as perceived by end users. All that the field would know is that they got the data communications they needed when and where they needed them.

The behind the scenes facts were that when a service request originated at a user location, it was reviewed at the corporate Help Desk, logged in at eZigma, and assigned to either a corporate or an eZigma service technician for completion.

During traditional business hours corporate might or might not fill a request depending on their own work load and geographic availability. If corporate techs' schedules were full, eZigma would take over.

When a service need occurred during evening, holiday or weekend hours, the request bypassed corporate, and landed at eZigma's Help Desk, was logged, assigned, and dispatched.

In both situations, the eZigma trouble ticket tracking system served as the control point. This created greater efficiencies, faster response times, the ability to construct trend analyses, and significantly improved cost control.

Outcome: External Costs Cut in Half

Pricing of eZigma's services was on a fixed-price-per-job basis. This encouraged consolidation of efforts and results in lower overall costs to MHI. This approach also simplified budgeting for MHI and eliminated the potential for error inherent in hourly billing.

"Since contracting with eZigma and migrating to a Citrix environment, MHI expenses for external IT maintenance services have been cut in half," according to Chief Financial Officer Gary Tesch, who oversees the IT department. "This savings comes from improved service quality, which translates into fewer computer and system outages, improved preventive and repair work, and more efficient utilization of service technicians."

It is little wonder that since the initial three-month trial began nearly four years ago, eZigma has become an integral and strategic component of the MHI success story.

The eZigma Difference

eZigma sees its role as that of a strategic business partner "because we understand more than just computers and networks. We understand what makes businesses succeed and we translate that into deploying computer systems that are more than mere tactical tools," says eZigma CEO Neil Patel.

Patel sees himself as a true hands-on manager, who can handle a repair call, is in regular contact with his clients, and insists on quarterly management reviews. "I do everything I can to ensure that eZigma understands a client's business and how technology can help that business prosper. That way we both succeed."

About eZigma

eZigma is a nationwide provider of insightful and affordable IT services. eZigma has been providing onsite IT services since 1996, works nationwide, has an extensive team of experienced consultants, and is committed to consultant availability in hours not days unlike its competitors. Anyone can repair a computer or install a printer. eZigma plans designs deploys secures and manages to improve your bottom line.

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Application Support
Desktop Support
Server Support
Network Support
Remote Support

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