

Bender-Burkot East Coast School Supply

Success Story

One of a series of articles celebrating the success of companies using today's information technology to solve operational problems common within their industries and beyond.



A Quick Summary

Company Profile

This is a family owned business located in Pollocksville, NC with a retail store in Greenville. Facing extreme competitive pressures, six of the seven school supply companies in North Carolina have closed in recent years. Bender-Burkot has not only survived but has experienced substantial growth.

Information System Needs

Handicapped by obsolete hardware and inflexible software, management was finding it increasingly difficult to service their customers. They decided to make major changes late in 2003.

Current Software & Hardware

All modules of SouthWare except Payroll, including ImportMate, WorkFlow, Extended Data, Forms Adapter and ExecuMate. A 25-user Microsoft Windows network with full Internet access. A Cisco/AVID voice over data IP telephone system.

Benefits

Customer service questions are much easier to answer, since information is available quickly and easily. Reports can be created easily as required by state contracts, and to help our salesmen. The tools available with SouthWare make the system extremely flexible.

"The internet has given us flexibility. Now we can reach the masses, not just existing customers within the region. With our new software, we can continue to grow without limit. It is one of the reasons we are able to compete. Without it, we wouldn't have a chance!"

—Frank Bender, President

Bender-Burkot was founded in 1961 by Frank Bender's father and cousin, and is a prominent business in the Eastern North Carolina town of Pollocksville. Employment ranges from fifty to around eighty during the busiest period each year.

Large "big box" office supply companies have entered the school supply business in recent years as a diversification strategy, and as a result of the intensive price competition many school supply companies have been forced to close their doors. Bender-Burkot has not only survived but has continued to grow during this time by retaining their established customers and aggressively seeking new ones.

The company has eight outside salespeople covering their primary four-state region of North and South Carolina, Georgia and Virginia. A new website makes online order entry available from anywhere, and has enabled extending their markets nationally and even internationally. Over an 84-month period, their sales have increased from \$3 million annually to \$14 million, thanks to the hard work of dedicated employees and some timely business decisions. For example, major additions were made to office and warehouse space, a marketing manager was hired, internet capabilities were added and new computer hardware and software were installed.

All things considered, the future looks good for Bender-Burkot. Good management has positioned the company to fill the needs of its many customers now and in the years to come.

For more information please contact Carolina Cipher at 800-948-9968X5, Email sales@ccipher.com, or visit us at www.carolinacipher.com.

 **Carolina Cipher**
Business Software Solutions Since 1977



This is a portion of one of six large warehouses in Pollocksville, arranged for efficient order picking.



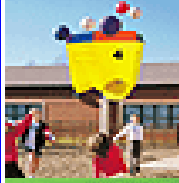
“SouthWare’s flexibility is great! I can’t imagine not having the tools that SouthWare makes available. Carolina CIPHER used the tools to make the system do what we wanted initially, in most cases without custom programming. I’m not really an IT specialist, but I have learned to use the tools myself to handle special needs. Every week we come up with a new report or something new.”

June Tripp, Office Manager



Could you describe your business for us in a few words?

“We sell over 30,000 items out of six warehouses, and process a high volume of orders with as many as 1500 line items per order. Thousands of schools want their back to school orders delivered on the same day. They wait until mid-August to place their orders and then want them immediately. Almost half our year’s business ships in a nine-week period, with our employees working a mandatory ten hours a day, six days a week with as much overtime as they will work. Plus we have the challenges of half our employees being temporary and inexperienced during that period.”



The Little Red Hen
By Ann Barton

Why did you need new software?

“We had to upgrade to keep up. We sell general school supplies, paper, office supplies, calculators, art supplies and much more. The same items are available from competitors, including the large office supply chains. We needed to keep up to date technologically with much larger companies, plus provide superior service. We couldn’t do it with our old software.”



COMPOSERS



“We have a number of state contracts, and they require a lot of special reporting, which was difficult or impossible. Plus you might wait an hour or more for a sort. Everything you did slowed the system down. You would initiate a search on the old software before lunch, and maybe it would be finished after lunch.”



Was the conversion difficult?

“Yes! We began preparations in early 2004, and went live over a 30 day period in May. We have so many special requirements, some of which we did not realize until we were in the middle of things. But we got through it successfully!”

Which SouthWare features are most helpful in your business?

“The reporting capabilities are great, and we can email reports and other communications to our customers. Being able to have multiple users within an application, with the input of each user identified so you can identify the source of errors. Drill down is excellent. I look at ExecuMate every day. It shows me dollar volume of orders and profit margin entered by each person. If something doesn’t look right on the income statement or GL, I can drill down and easily find the source of the problem. That is extremely helpful to me.”

“Customer service is much better. Questions are easy to answer, since system inquiries are so easy and fast. Everything is so much faster. Sorts are quick. Searches are easy and just immediate. We have the capability for 25 users on the system, and can maintain good response time for everyone while sorting, searching or running reports.”

How do you rate Carolina CIPHER Support?

“Good! Everybody is really helpful. CIPHER has the SouthWare source code, so they can respond to questions and problems immediately. During the conversion, our CIPHER consultant was focused on us for months, and was here with me until all hours of the night, 80 hours one week. It was a very high-stress time.”

What advice would you offer to others?

“Look at cost, flexibility, reporting capability and conversion issues. Factor in all the costs. The cost of the software is only the beginning. Look for software you can grow with. Look for good support. If you don’t have it, you don’t have anything. Are your support company’s people capable? Also, be sure to get your internal people on board to help.”