

**Industry:**

Real Estate building and development

Description:

Developer of commercial properties; manages the entire process from construction through sales

Business Challenge:

Centralized knowledge repository for contacts, appointments, tasks, construction schedules, broker contracts, projects and other information. Management of large group e-mail campaigns and automated information updating on company Web sites.

Product/Solution:

Commence, an award-winning CRM solution, enables businesses to capture, manage and share information across the organization

Key Features:

- Easily customizable by non-technical staff people
- Integrates with group e-mail software
- Powerful relational database
- Seamless Web integration

Results:

- Easily capture, track, manage and share information, both internally and externally through company Web sites
- Schedule and manage marketing campaigns based on broker profile or geography
- Monitor project progress and schedules from initial project planning through government entitlements, construction, marketing and finally lease-up and sales
- Real-time inventory management

Commence Case Study

Venture Corporation

Based in Northern California, Venture Corporation is one of the area's largest builders of business properties for sale. Since its formation in 1976, the company has developed numerous commercial, R&D, residential and mixed-use projects throughout California and in Nevada, Washington, Oregon, New Mexico and Utah. The professionals employed by Venture Corporation have extensive expertise in all aspects of the commercial real estate industry including property acquisition, government entitlements, environmental compliance, project planning and design, debt and equity finance, construction, marketing, leasing and sales.

Similar to other development firms, Venture Corporation manages an abundance of data. In addition to maintaining a database of industry contacts and details pertaining to more than 220,000 real estate brokers and dozens of complex development projects, Venture Corporation also needs to manage and track business appointments, employee schedules and project particulars to ensure successful execution. As with any large scale construction project, building commercial properties requires effective planning and the ability to successfully multi-task. To ensure deadlines are met and projects remain on track, Venture Corporation relies on Commence CRM.

"We started using the solution more than a decade ago when Commence was an innovative program in its infancy. While Commence refers to it as a CRM program, it's so much more than that," said Robert Eves, president of Venture Corporation. "Initially we used it to store and manage our contacts, appointments, phone numbers and schedules, but we expanded the functionality to also use it for every aspect of project management. Whenever we start a new project, there are multiple steps that need to be completed. Through Commence we have visibility into every facet of a project, and it ensures that we are able to understand and adhere to project timelines and milestones. Every participant and consultant involved in every detail of the work is linked through Commence, so we are able to keep all team members actively involved every step of the way."

The Commence Solution

Commence Corporation's "best in class" CRM software offers a comprehensive suite of applications for business contact management, sales and sales force automation, marketing, campaign management, lead management, project management, customer support and analytics.

Venture Corporation uses the solution to manage its database of industry contacts and commercial and residential real estate brokers. A centralized repository for information, the company uses the solution to store and access names, addresses and phone numbers as well as to schedule reminders for key events such as client follow-up.

Commence's flexibility at a base information storage level is very beneficial to us," Robert Eves commented. "We are able to tailor fields unique to our business requirements and with one click can access a contact or send an e-mail. We can even retain a copy of that e-mail within Commence so that we can easily track what was intended by the parties. The solution is integrated with our group e-mail software, and we use it to send out marketing campaigns based on demographics or broker profiles."

Founded in 1988, Commence Corporation is a leading provider of e-business and customer relationship management (CRM) software solutions. The company's products are designed to provide small- to medium-sized businesses with flexible solutions that leverage the Web to offer an integrated platform for e-business. Commence supports thousands of users through a worldwide distribution network, with outlets in North and South America, Europe, and Asia/Pacific. For more information, contact Commence Corporation at 732-660-0990, or visit the company's Web site at www.commence.com.

For example, when Venture Corporation starts a new project, they use the system to communicate to thousands of real estate brokers such events as a ground breaking or the opening of a new project phase, but may only want to target a particular geographic region. Sending a new message is as simple as designing the communication, identifying the target group within the company's Commence database and automatically distributing it through the system. Eves estimates that the company sends 30,000 messages each week and, by having the automated functionality, they are able to proactively communicate with the broker community.

The company also uses the software to manage schedules, priorities and assignments. For each construction project, various employees and partners such as a construction company or architectural firm are involved and need to work together to meet certain milestones and maintain project momentum.

"Commence is a relational database and so it enables us to link different information components," said Eves. "I am able to put certain tasks on a to-do list and then link them to a project manager or whoever is responsible for the necessary action. I'm also able to run a report that provides an overview of the things that need to get done, their status and whose job it is to do them. We created these report templates long ago, so we need only click on a button to produce one. The solution also has automated reminders, which helps foster better communication and ensures that we meet our goals and deadlines."

The ability to build multiple databases within the system is also helpful for project management. For every new development property, there are various steps that need to get completed from identifying the appropriate site, negotiating the terms of purchase, collaborating with the city to get approval on designs and working with banks, construction groups and marketing and sales professionals.

"Over the years, we learned that many steps in the development and building process are repeated in one project after another," said Eves. "We created a simple database in Commence that tracks all those steps, and our project managers fill in the fields to show target and completion dates and to add notes where needed. We can even look back a year later and know what happened at each stage and who was involved."

Commence also helps manage property inventory and communicates with the company's Web site so brokers and buyers have access to real-time information. Each Venture Professional Center has multiple individual properties for sale or lease and information about those properties are stored in Commence. When a buyer enters into contract to purchase a property from the company, the Web site is automatically updated indicating that the property is no longer available. This optimizes the brokers' time and provides a better customer experience for the buyer or tenant because they can see which properties are available and which are not before visiting a project site.

For the project manager, Commence stores the entire database on their individual laptop, so even if they are without an Internet connection, they still have access to all the information they need to get their job done.

"With some software solutions, the minute you are unplugged from the network, you lose access to your critical information," said Eves. "With Commence, even if project managers are traveling on a plane, they can still get to their information and make changes. When they re-establish an Internet connection, everything is automatically updated."

"Commence is an extraordinary product that is tremendously useful for us," he concluded. "We use it for our marketing outreach, customer communication, project management and reporting capabilities. It's proven to be a reliable solution that is the cornerstone of our operation."