

A TechInsight Success Story: NJR Home Services

by: Kathleen Lyons

When NJR Home Services spun off in 2000 from its affiliate company, New Jersey Natural Gas, Roy Churchman knew one of the new company's biggest challenges would be competing in an already crowded market.



Competition for appliance repair and installation included giants Sears Roebuck and Co. and Home Depot. But that wasn't all.

"In New Jersey, if you look in the phone book, under "furnace" [repair], you'll find 100 people doing it, and not with the same overhead as we had," said Churchman, Home Services, Director.

As a result, Home Services managers formed a committee, including representatives of the technicians' union, to make a significant reduction in expenses and at the same time improve efficiency. One of the committee's recommendations was to get a better handle on technicians' performance. While the company had general data, it lacked detail on individual technicians' work, including which repairs required follow-up attention.

That's when Doug Beeman, President of 3-Point Technologies, contacted Home Services management and pitched his company's TechInsight software, which would work with the computers Home Services technicians already carried in their trucks. Beeman promised TechInsight would crunch raw data Home Services was already collecting and turn it into detailed information on each technician and job.

"It was serendipitous," Churchman said. "The software fell right into this committee's lap. We took it and ran with it."

Home Services signed a contract with 3-Point in November of 2002. Within two months, TechInsight was up and providing scorecards on every job done by every technician.

"What it's done is it's brought accountability," Churchman said.

TechInsight reports how each technician is performing and allows supervisors to "drill down" to look at an individual job and find out how long it took the technician to get to the address, handle the assignment, and - of critical interest to managers - whether a repeat visit was needed because the work was not satisfactory. TechInsight also shows how long it should have taken the technician to get to the address and complete the job.

"The data we're getting back is accurate," Churchman said. "And the union feels it can trust the data. It's not manipulated."

By and large, technicians have accepted TechInsight. It's helped that they haven't

been required to learn any new reporting or computer skills.

Ryan Ballagh, 3-Point Vice President of Implementation, said many technicians actually like the scorecards because they factor in circumstances affecting the duration and difficulty of a job.

For example, Ballagh said jobs in an old neighborhood often take longer because the appliances maybe old and tricky to repair. And technicians working in zones where travel times are longer know the system's sophisticated mapping software will provide realistic arrival times.

Jerry DeToro, Manager of Service Operations, said TechInsight lets managers know who's doing a "bang-up job" and who might need more training. DeToro rotates his five supervisors through "3-Point meetings" every two weeks. At the meetings they review the latest scorecard and determine whether adjustments need to be made.

Home Services managers say they use TechInsight for training purposes, not for policing.

Churchman said Home Services met its goal of reducing costs thanks partly to TechInsight.

The company had set a goal of reducing its staff of 67 service technicians by eight, but has been able to cut it by 10 even while doing more work, he said. With the improved efficiency, Churchman said, technicians are handling at least 15 percent more jobs than two years ago, and with fewer repeat calls and improved customer satisfaction.

"This past winter ... we went through the coldest January in some years in New Jersey, and we've gotten through with less technicians than in other years," DeToro said.

Churchman said he's been surprised by how smooth the process has been because changes involving data processing can often produce kinks, unforeseen problems, and end up becoming more expensive.

"It continues to go very well," he said. "I applaud the whole process."



NJR Home Services is a subsidiary of New Jersey Resources (NYSE:NJR), a *Fortune 1000* company and a member of the *Forbes Platinum 400*.

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