

Case Study:

Gibson Consulting Group, for Katy
Independent School District (ISD)

by Jane Affleck

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Company:

- Gibson Consulting Group

Industry or service:

Gibson

- Public education management and operations consulting, including efficiency analysis, performance-based budgeting, and decision support

Katy ISD

- K-12 education

Geography:

Gibson

- based in Austin, Texas (US)

Katy ISD

- based in the city of Katy, Texas (US), and encompassing 181 square miles (291 square kilometers) just west of Houston, Texas.

Software Requirements:

- an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, to be deployed in Katy's finance and human resource (HR) departments, as well as in most
- locations in the district for purchasing and employee self-service activities

Software Selection Project Needs:

Gibson

- wanted a partner to provide enriching technology support for its client's ERP evaluation and selection project, to reduce time and cost of the project

Katy ISD

- wanted external help to take burden of task off its internal IT departments, as they had little experience in this magnitude of ERP project

Users:

Katy ISD

- 201 to 500 users across the district will access the selected ERP system/modules

Software Selection Expert:

- Gibson joined forces with Technology Evaluation Centers (TEC) to help with various stages of its client's evaluation, including analyzing proposals and vendor demonstration scores with TEC's eBestMatch™ decision support system (DSS)

Benefits:

To Katy ISD

- TEC's methodology, with Gibson's experience delivering projects of this type, helped provide an objective and comprehensive analysis of prioritized requirements and scores
- examination of the sensitivity analysis graphs prevented second-guessing about the prioritization of requirements
- the results produced by eBestMatch are justifiable and so provide a stronger business case to stakeholders (Katy ISD's board members)

To Gibson

- 25 percent decrease in time required to provide full range of evaluation services
- greater efficiency means Gibson's services can be offered at a lower cost, to more clients



“Once I used Technology Evaluation Centers for one project, I didn’t want to go back to doing software evaluation the hard way. Analysis that once took me 3 weeks with Access databases takes 3 days or less with TEC’s cooperation.”

– Kim Scambilis, Project Manager and Senior Consultant, Gibson Consulting Group.

ABCs of the Companies

Gibson Consulting Group is an Austin, Texas (US)-based firm dedicated to helping K-12 school systems improve their efficiency and effectiveness. In addition to efficiency analysis, the company also provides services for performance-based budgeting, technology consulting, decision support, strategic planning, and more.

Katy Independent School District (Katy ISD) is a suburban school district located in south Texas (US), with eastern boundaries reaching to within 16 miles (26 kilometers) of downtown Houston, Texas. Katy ISD has a total staff of 6,786 and an enrollment of 53,762 for the 2007-2008 school year, at 31 elementary schools, 12 junior highs, and 7 high schools.

Reading 'n' Writing 'n' ERP: The Challenge of Software Selection Projects for ISD

For many independent school districts, one of the biggest challenges of a major software project is the ongoing lack of funding for technology. Schools must place a higher importance on instruction, and therefore instructional technology, than on other types of technology (such as infrastructure or ERP systems), according to Ali Taylan, chief technology officer (CTO) at Gibson Consulting Group. Although Katy ISD is unusual in that it already has solid IT infrastructure in place and is, Taylan notes, considered a “technology leader,” the school district still had a few concerns about handling the ERP selection project on its own.

Katy ISD has a skilled IT department, but IT staff had not implemented a new finance system since the early 90s. During conversations with other ISDs that were in the process of large-scale software selections or implementations, Katy ISD became convinced that external help was essential. “We realized that a neutral third party would take some of the burden off of our district,” says Kerry Rampelli, senior project manager at Katy ISD. “But also, we knew we had one shot to get this right, and that defining our requirements and capturing our ‘as-is’ processes were imperative to the overall success of the project.”



Katy ISD Seeks Help from Gibson Consulting

Because of the project’s complexity, Katy ISD chose Gibson Consulting Group to tackle the steps involved in the evaluation and selection project.

Gibson was contracted to accurately capture all requirements with an organized methodology, and optimize change management at all stages of the process. Also, Gibson would provide efficiency analysis of “as-is” processes, prior to the requirements gathering—to find ways that Katy ISD employees could improve the efficiency of their daily tasks.

Gibson started with as-is process analysis to document major processes and to determine the school district’s unique requirements. This process involved working closely with representatives from each of Katy ISD’s departments, to ensure all major legacy processes were thoroughly described and documented. These processes, and any recommended improvements to them, were then “translated” into software functionalities in order to create a request for proposal (RFP) that software vendors could relate and respond to.

In prior projects, Gibson had found that trying to manage the considerable quantities of data from clients such as Katy ISD, as well as the data from vendors, was challenging with the tools it had in place. “At the time,” explains Kim Scambilis, project manager and senior consultant for Gibson, “I was using Access databases to evaluate vendors’ responses and match them to clients’ needs—but it was very time-consuming and complex to re-configure the database for each client.”

Scambilis thought there must be a more efficient software evaluation methodology, and started researching the options.



Gibson Partners with TEC for More Efficient Evaluation Expertise

After finding Technology Evaluation Centers (TEC) on the Internet, Scambilis was contacted by a representative who gave a demonstration of TEC's eBestMatch™ decision support system (DDS). "I was very impressed with it," Scambilis remembers. "It seemed to me that TEC's ability to pre-populate the vendors' prior responses to the requirements was a big plus, as it would increase the response rates to our clients' RFPs."

TEC's eBestMatch system incorporates the information about the functionality of vendors' solutions stored in TEC's knowledge bases. When a client provides its list of requirements, these requirements can be compared with vendor functionalities—saving clients valuable time at this key stage of software selection and evaluation.

TEC Helps Gibson Provide Accurate—and Speedy—Software Evaluation

"TEC provided Gibson with valuable technology support," states Scambilis. "TEC's methodology was similar to our own, and the eBestMatch system was much more flexible and efficient than the tools I was using before. Once I used TEC for one project, I didn't want to go back to doing it the hard way. Analysis that once took me 3 weeks in Access, now takes 3 days or less with TEC's assistance."

Scambilis also explains that "the total cost at which we are able to offer our clients a project of this scope has decreased dramatically, due to the increased efficiencies of using TEC's services. By using TEC's eBestMatch, we've been able to cut the time required for our full-service option—including process mapping—from 9 months to about 6. The analysis of vendor responses to the requirements used to take one consultant dedicated for 2 weeks, and two other consultants dedicated for up to 4 days each. Now, one consultant can perform the analysis in under one week."



TEC Offers Resources and Knowledge that Gibson Can Build On

For Gibson, the benefits of partnering with TEC for key phases of software selection/evaluation will continue for some time to come. For one thing, Scambilis analyzed the project execution for efficiency and created documentation for future use. The documentation details how and when TEC's project team interacted with Gibson's during Katy ISD's ERP evaluation project, and how the related tasks can be effectively accomplished. She then used this information to create a user guide or desk reference manual for other consultants at Gibson, so that in her absence, "they can complete a similar project with the same high level of service when they use eBestMatch."

TEC Helps Provide Analysis of Cost versus Functionality

When asked if she would be interested in using TEC for another software evaluation project, Scambilis' answer is unequivocal: "Absolutely," she says. In fact, Gibson has already partnered with TEC for three separate projects.

Why? "One of the major benefits of working with TEC for me—as a project manager—has been that TEC's eBestMatch performs the parts of the process I don't like." She laughs. "But to be more precise, one of the advantages of the eBestMatch system is that your decision to implement a software solution is justifiable and presents a strong business case. Board members like to see a logical representation of what value each software solution offers—and the cost of implementation. With eBestMatch and "what-if" analysis, you get the figures you need to support your case."

Gibson Plus TEC Equals Successful Project Outcome

Kerry Rampelli wholeheartedly supports Scambilis' view. "It has been so beneficial for us to have every aspect of the process scored and input into software that can quickly provide a breakdown with clear results that we can analyze as a leadership team, as well as present to our Board and Superintendent."

"School district staff members are sometimes unsure of what their critical requirements are," Scambilis adds, "because they perceive them all to be important. Because of Gibson's partnership with TEC, prioritization of requirements is easier. And, the ability of eBestMatch to provide what-if analysis takes the guesswork out of the equation."

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