XLERANT

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– Georgia Municipal Association

The Customer

Created in 1933, the Georgia Municipal Association (GMA) is a state organization that represents municipal governments in Georgia. Based in Atlanta, GMA is a non-profit that provides services for legislative advocacy, education, employee benefits, and technical consulting to its members— to help them make improvements in Georgia cities.

GMA's membership currently totals 521 municipal governments, accounting for more than 99% of the state's municipal population. A 63-member Board of Directors, composed of city officials, governs GMA. Program implementation is charged to the Executive Director and staff of 91 full-time employees, with approximately one quarter of them playing a part in GMA's budgeting process.

Jon Ter Louw is a financial analyst who has been at GMA for three years. With extensive experience across the accounting and finance departments, he has been involved in a variety of organizational roles.

The Problem

Jon explains that before BudgetPak, GMA's budget process utilized very complex Excel spreadsheets— with a separate spreadsheet for each department and multiple tabs for each of the many units. "We do planning by person, by department – where we split them up based on their roles and their determinations and all the way down to their benefits," says Jon. "So we do very complicated personnel budgeting."

With the Excel system, GMA department heads would input their numbers into spreadsheets that they didn't always understand, or like. Subsequently, the finance team would have to spend copious hours consolidating and reporting. "It was a very time consuming process," recalls Jon.

In addition to the time factor was yet another Excel problem—user error. Jon recounts, "In the last three years…**we had errors that could range from something as simple as 'Oh, it's only $500,' to something as serious as $25,000 – which just went poof and vanished in the budgets.** Errors were pervasive using Excel and trying to do linked spreadsheets. The spreadsheets that we sent out to the end users would always get corrupted, so we had to manually key and check and then transfer it into the true linked spreadsheets. You miss a line, and you have a new error. You add a new account but don't carry it through all your spreadsheets, and you have a new error. It's been a headache to say the least."

The Evaluation and Implementation

When GMA's CFO tasked Jon with improving the company's budget process and enhancing it over the future, Jon began his search for a new budgeting solution. Jon recalls, "My number one concern when we started the search was functionality, because it had to be able to do what we needed it to do in our budgeting process – and we were rather complex. Almost hand-in-hand with that, we had to have a user experience that made it easier for the users to actually budget, approve

the budget, and then be able to take the responsibility for the numbers that they had provided. And lastly we needed an application that was web-based so that people didn't have to have special software loaded onto their computers." **BudgetPak was a natural choice for GMA, as the web-based platform combined exceptional functionality with an intuitive user interface, addressing GMA's most important needs.**

Jon notes that the BudgetPak implementation did not require any GMA IT support whatsoever, which saved time and cost for the company. "The IT team gave BudgetPak an initial documentation review, but the whole BudgetPak implementation was done through finance, along with the current operations," says Jon. **"Our IT department was happy about a cloud-based system and not having to devote any of its own resources."**

The Solution

"BudgetPak is a software that does it all for you," Jon commends. "It automatically does your roll ups; it automatically takes care of everything. That means if one department uses it, BudgetPak rolls it all up so you don't miss it in the summary. **Errors and user experience were two of our big reasons for changing our process and moving from Excel to an actual budgeting system."**

Jon values that BudgetPak helps GMA tie budgeting into their business strategy. "We certainly consider budgeting a mission critical activity," proclaims Jon. "Although we're not-for-profit and we're not so concerned with the bottom line, we are very concerned with long-term viability."

"If you don't have a budget in place, and if you don't have plans in place, next thing you know, any type of reserve gets eaten away and you're three years down the line and running yourself out the door trying to scramble for revenues to stay in business," says Jon. "And from the nonprofit standpoint, if you don't have an idea of what you're doing and where you're going, it becomes a huge problem that prevents you from fulfilling your mission and goals."

Jon is pleased with BudgetPak's positive impact on GMA's ability to build a strategic budget—supporting the company's noble goal of providing long-term betterment for its members and cities.

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