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Sonja Vanlangenvelde, CFO, Daszkal Bolton

An in-depth Case Study
With Star behind us, I have no doubt that we will continue to conquer new ground, uphold our corporate values, remain competitive, champion best practice and keep our clients and their goals at the heart of everything we do.

A business with a corporate vision of ‘conquering new ground’, Daszkal Bolton has significant expertise in providing hyper-focused services and innovative solutions to individuals, companies and organizations across multiple industries.

Founded in 1992 by Michael Daszkal and Jeff Bolton, the South Florida firm now employs approximately 150 people in Boca Raton, Fort Lauderdale and Jupiter and has evolved into one of the leading accounting and advisory practices in the Sunshine State.

Despite consistent growth over the best part of thirty years, the firm remains true to its ethos of providing more than just accounting services. Woven into the fabric of the company is the unwavering drive to support clients to accomplish their goals. This means promising relationships clients can trust and services they can rely upon; that are reinforced by the firm’s commitment to upholding strong ethical standards and operating effectively, entrepreneurially and professionally.

To maintain these high standards, in early 2016 the firm initiated a review of its practice management system. The rationale being that if back office processes, like bill generation and timesheet completion, could be made simpler and more effective, the firm could further enhance its service to clients, while benefitting from increased productivity.

Until this point, Daszkal Bolton had been utilizing a competing practice management system for 20 years. Although Daszkal Bolton’s people were familiar with the software and its functionality, there was clear need for a more modern platform, capable of improving the firm’s operations. This would have to provide better information management, realization, utilization, and cash flow resulting in much greater agility and control.

“Our corporate values are not just words for the website, they shape our approach and inform our behaviors. We continuously strive to be both entrepreneurial and effective and this was not something that was facilitated well by our old software. We could have continued using the system, but we were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with its ability to scrutinize the masses of data it contained.”

“From a business standpoint, this represented a real problem. Reporting and dissecting information relating to client workflows, WIP Management, billing, time, budgeting and scheduling is such a vital part of our business, yet this was very difficult and time consuming. Through our affiliation with Boomer and AGN, we knew more advanced systems existed, so we were keen to assess our options”
explains Joy Stamm, Daszkal Bolton’s Firm Administrator.

In addition to addressing their limited reporting capabilities, Daszkal Bolton also needed a system that could be shaped around their specific requirements and adjust to their evolving needs. Key to this was a desire to better understand clients and their particular requirements so that targeted communications could be crafted to provide timely and personalized recommendations of products and services. Automating this workflow would support the firm’s business development function but would require significant customization. This is something that not every vendor would be willing or able to accommodate.

A final factor Daszkal Bolton wanted to address was their reliance upon manual, paper-based processes. By embracing automation, the firm hoped to reduce the administration burden and improve productivity.

Led by Joy Stamm, Firm Administrator and Chief Financial Officer, Sonja VanLangevelde, the firm carried out a meticulous review of the market, inviting multiple vendors to pitch for the business and provide demonstrations. Commenting on the initial phase of the project, Sonja recalls her first impressions: “We entered the review process with a clear idea of what we wanted, what our non-negotiables were and an open mind. We reached out to several peer groups, including Boomer and AGN, for advice and recommendations to help build our understanding of what best practice looked like in relation to specifying and implementing a new practice management system.”

“We demoed several options in addition to Star. We took due diligence very seriously at this stage, after all we could be using the new system for the next 20 years. We needed to look at the good, the bad and the ugly!

“Some of the systems were still operating on old platforms, and we lacked confidence in the vendors’ ability to build what we needed from scratch, especially considering that only a few really specialized in the accountancy sector. We could not afford the risk of selecting a system where our requests for enhancements end up gathering dust in a folder in the sky. As the demos progressed, it became clearer that we needed to select something that was not only designed specifically for CPA firms but also highly customizable.”

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In July 2016, following a thorough scoping process, Daszkal Bolton awarded the contract to Star and began implementing the company’s functionality-rich and technically advanced practice management software. Built on a modular structure, Daszkal Bolton initially opted for Star’s web-based Time and Expense module and windows-based Billing, with inbuilt automated reporting capabilities.

The implementation was expertly managed by Star consultants, as Joy confirms: “Our old system was band-aided together, which made it difficult for us to step back and start afresh, but we were determined not to carry over bad habits. The team at Star understood this and provided an extensive amount of handholding, which helped us properly consider what we wanted to accomplish.”

Joy continues: “Star really had the implementation process down to a tee. They produced a workable calendar, we knew exactly what was expected of us and when, we had two database tests before our go-live, which gave us the opportunity to review in context. Despite Star being based in the UK, it never presented an issue. They were physically in the office and available when and where we needed them, which led to great collaboration. We thought we knew what we wanted but as we grew to realize how powerful the system was, the scope evolved to include more customization, and this was the great thing – we didn’t want another out of the box system, we wanted something we could mold.”

Once core modules were live and delivering value, Daszkal Bolton rolled out Star’s Mobile functionality to further enhance paperless expenses reimbursement and time monitoring processes.

Star’s intuitive Web and native Mobile Time and Expenses functionality has enabled Daszkal Bolton to increase time capture as well as streamline expense recharge and reimbursement, resulting in improved billing and recovery. Expense image and PDF receipt files can be linked for approval and billing, whether via Web or Mobile.

The firm’s use of Star’s Mobile functionality has further improved this newfound efficiency by enabling the capture of Time and Expenses anytime, anywhere - thereby ensuring that WIP is billed more rapidly than ever before.

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Joy Stamm, Firm Administrator
Use of Star’s Billing module has given the firm access to a vast array of billing options and methods of allocating WIP against a bill, in addition to helping Daszkal Bolton’s people to identify billing opportunities more easily than before. This is making bill generation faster and improving cash flow. The module’s ability to analyze data is taking the pain out of multiple processes, including setting billing targets and fee forecasting for the year ahead, which is now calculated by the system. The module is also saving time and resource by generating repetitive, periodic bills automatically and by providing users with direct access to relevant client and engagement documents, speeding up bill preparation and approvals.

Customizing Star’s TaskCentre Automation module, Daszkal Bolton has created something very special: a client and prospect profile workflow. This bespoke functionality allows the firm better to understand and classify its clients and prospects by surveying them on a range of commercial, lifestyle and aspiration criteria. The module then harnesses data and informs relevant personnel, via automated email alerts. As such, personalized communications can be crafted that promote targeted services at appropriate times; cementing the firm’s standing as advisors, in-tune with their clients’ needs, rather than simply tax preparers or reactive service providers.

As Star software integrates seamlessly with multiple third-party systems, the firm is also benefitting from a reduction in duplicate data entry. This is through Star automatically sharing data with Daszkal Bolton’s Document Management System, which empowers the firm to re-focus resource on fee-generating activity instead.

Summarizing the benefits of migrating to Star, Sonja says: “You can’t put a figure on the value implementing Star has had, but it’s been incredibly positive. All processes are quicker and more efficient. Because billing is now more automated, bills are generated with immediacy, which means fees are paid much faster than before. Closing the month down has been cut by weeks, which has been transformative. We used to struggle with spreadsheets but now billing runs like clockwork and has freed up time and resource.”

To continue its journey of practice management best practice, Daszkal Bolton plans to migrate from Star’s windows-based Billing module to the web-based equivalent, which not only further enhances the billing process, but provides greater mobility through
associated native mobile offerings. The firm also plans to introduce Star's Scheduling and Due Dates modules.

Reflecting on the firm’s experience with Star, Sonja concludes: “Migrating to a new practice management system was a big commitment for our firm but the Star team have been so hands on, knowledgeable and responsive throughout the journey that the whole experience has been as painless as possible and the benefits are clear.

“With Star behind us, I have no doubt that we will continue to conquer new ground, uphold our corporate values, remain competitive, champion best practice and keep our clients and their goals at the heart of everything we do.”

Sonja Vanlangevelde, CFO