

With Actionable Construction Information, Las Vegas' Carma Group Continues to Soar

OVERVIEW

When the Carma Group, a general contractor serving Las Vegas' entertainment industry, saw its revenues surpass \$10 million in just its second year, the founders realized QuickBooks Online couldn't scale with the company's growth. Carma Group deployed Acumatica Construction Edition, which provided them with actionable insights to manage projects more effectively, operate more efficiently, and increase overall profitability.

KEY RESULTS

- Implemented a single, connected, cloud-based ERP platform that was industry-specific
- Gained actionable construction data at the click of a button saving many hours per month
- Acquired ability to attach documents for real-time information storage and retrieval
- Facilitated move to the cloud that made remote work during the pandemic a breeze
- Connected to Procore project management application seamlessly, providing project site access
- Gained easy to use tools allowing customized dashboards, personalized reporting and drill downs
- Eliminated need for backups, redundancy, networking, and backup power supplies with cloud-based system
- Allowed firm to scale revenues 10-fold

CHALLENGES

When Chris and Angie Rowe launched Carma Group, a general contracting business focused on Las Vegas' entertainment industry, their strategy was to build a different kind of construction firm, one focused on treating its customers, subcontractors and employees as partners and family members.

They hand-picked the team, took a forward-thinking and collaborative approach to serving customers, and decided to specialize in helping restaurants, casinos, hotels, and other venues upgrade their facilities. That approach helped them grow revenues to nearly \$100 million in just seven years, with much of that growth coming as Las Vegas entertainment venues rushed to refresh their properties after the pandemic.

The company is well known for annually building the grandstand over the Bellagio resort's Fountains at Bellagio, allowing the resort to protect its famous fountains during the annual Formula One races in Las Vegas.

Like many startups, Carma Group chose QuickBooks Online as its first accounting package. But as many fast-growing startups quickly learn, the basic financial package wasn't designed to handle construction accounting or the huge influx of business that Carma experienced. "It just wasn't meeting our needs," says Bob Scott, Chief Financial Officer. QuickBooks Online couldn't job cost. It also couldn't provide the in-depth data the firm needed.

"If you want to bounce along at \$5 million, you can get away with it, but if you want to do what we're doing now, you absolutely positively cannot," Scott says. "You're driving blind."

"You can't tell how much you're spending on labor, how much you're spending on subcontracts, how much you're spending on dumpsters or toilets or fire extinguishers, things like that," he adds. "You could kind of reverse engineer it by running reports and using a highlighter. But that's not practical, that's not useful, and it's really not built for that."



Company

Carma Group
www.carmalv.com

Industry

Construction – General Contractor

Number of Employees

Approx. 32 full time employees

Location

Las Vegas, NV

Products

Acumatica Construction product with:

- Financials
- Monitoring and Automation
- Project Accounting
- Retainage
- Compliance
- Velixo

Customer Social Sharing Details

 www.facebook.com/CARMLasVegas

 www.linkedin.com/company/carma-group-llc

Partner Details



AKTION Associates
www.aktion.com

Earlier in its history, Carma Group added Procore, a construction project management software program, to its technology stack, but without a direct connection to QuickBooks Online, the accounting and finance team had to manually transfer financial data from Procore. In addition, extracting meaningful data from QuickBooks Online took hours and extra manual manipulation to get an accurate picture of the company's operations.

"I'm in the information business," Scott says. "My value doesn't lie in doing financial statements. My value lies in getting actionable intelligence as quick as possible."

Carma Group wanted a flexible ERP, one that could connect to Procore for project management, and extract information from easily. Executives wanted a cloud-based solution so they didn't have to manage expensive technology infrastructure, hire an inside IT team to manage that infrastructure, and so executives and project managers could connect from job sites, from home, and while on vacation. They also wanted to connect the financial system to other third-party software as needed.

The Rowses hired Scott as CFO and asked him to move them to a modern system tailored to the construction industry. He evaluated Sage, Viewpoint, and Acumatica, which he had helped implement at several firms while working at a technology integration firm.

SOLUTION

Scott recommended Acumatica Construction because it was tailored to its industry with job costing, change order, and commitment functionality, was conceived in the cloud, and allowed third-party applications like Procore to connect seamlessly. The unique pay-as-you-go consumption licensing model made the platform affordable, and its ease of use and personalization were attractive.

"At the time I was evaluating, the other software wasn't really cloud-based," Scott says. "They were more remote-desktop based. One of the things that I really liked about Acumatica is they started being cloud-based. They didn't start in a traditional client server base and then convert it. This was built from the ground up, and cloud-based all the time."

In addition, when he used Timberline, Foundation, and Vista, "I would extract data and then had to spend a lot of time manipulating this data to get what I actually wanted," he says.

With Acumatica, "I can filter and I can sort and I can get the information the way I want it," Scott says. "I can hit this button and it dumps data right into Excel. I don't need to dump it into Excel and then manipulate it again. It dumps it into Excel and then I can just do simple subtotals or whatever I want in there. Acumatica gets me information really, really quick."

BENEFITS

Actionable Intelligence

Scott estimates he's saved countless hours by having instant and accurate information all in one place. He and others spend time making better decisions rather than digging for data and manipulating it.

While having data at one's fingertips doesn't sound earth-shattering, it does allow Carma Group to make more informed decisions, improve project efficiency, and reduce costs, which often results in increased project success and profitability. Delivering projects on time and on budget increases the firm's reputation and has led clients to rehire Carma Group without the need to compete through RFPs.

Most of Carma Group's project managers operate in Procore while Scott acts as the main point of contact for data in Acumatica because he is an Acumatica power user. Project managers all have access to Acumatica and Scott has taught them how to pull information. But they are encouraged to use him as an information resource.

"If they need detail, I encourage them to come ask me because that's my area of expertise," Scott explains. "I try to get them actionable information quickly so they can make decisions on running their projects, either minimizing margin fade, or taking opportunities to enhance margins."

"My value lies in getting actionable intelligence as quick as possible," he reiterates. "And some of those features in Acumatica, like the simple little Excel button, allows me to do that. While I was being pushed away from QuickBooks Online because I couldn't get that information, I'm being pulled in by Acumatica saying, 'Look what we can do.'"



“We build great, amazing things here in Las Vegas. Acumatica lets me do that because it's constantly improving, constantly taking development cues from its users and implementing them. I can see what the future holds. I can see what the things they're working on, and I love leveraging the things it's doing to make my job easier, smarter, better, and faster.”

– Bob Scott,
Chief Financial Officer,
Carma Group

Personalization, Customized Dashboards

That's not to say, Scott says, that he dumps everything into Excel. Acumatica is highly configurable and allows users to personalize screens and dashboards to make them actionable based on their titles, the way they work, and the data they need.

For example, he says he created a report showing outstanding payables and whether they are pending, on hold, or balanced, which helps him understand what might be impacting the company's monthly financials. "That kind of customization is so easy to do in Acumatica," he says. "I have actionable intelligence at the click of a button."

The accounting team also uses Velixo, a third-party application that seamlessly connects to Acumatica and supercharges reporting and budgeting. "It basically creates a whole new set of formulas, and it reaches Acumatica, pulls data, and puts it right where I want it," Scott says. "I absolutely love that."

Scott uses Acumatica's dashboards daily to see how the company is performing. He color-coded one dashboard so he can instantly see what his priorities should be. "The dashboards are nice because I like to manage by exception," he says. "What do I need to focus today? If everything's green, I can just do my regular things, but if something turns red, then I should go chase that down. Instead of me running a report to see if anybody past due today, this dashboard tells me every time I log in."

Acumatica also makes it easy for people to configure screens and make dashboards that reflect how they operate. "Employees can enter data in the order that makes sense to them," Scott says. "Instead of bending your ways to the way the ERP system works, it's so easy to change Acumatica to accommodate something the way you want. It's the little things that make Acumatica different."

Keisha Baum, who recently joined Carma Group as a project coordinator, agrees. "Being able to navigate it immediately and easily was huge for me," she says. "I've found Acumatica to be very time efficient; I can pop into the system and find information inside of probably less than a minute."

She also likes that she can personalize screens without being a developer. "The configurability of the system has allowed me to really make it mine. It allows me to look at what I need to look at on the screen versus what five different people need to look at."

Baum adds, "Compared to other systems, it's definitely a lot easier to use to find information because you don't have to go to 8,000 places to find it. I found it very, very, very user-friendly and very navigable."

Ability to Attach Documents

Scott appreciates that he can make notations and attach documents to transactions within Acumatica. "Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, it's going to be on an invoice, but I can put notes on anything," he says. "I can leave breadcrumbs, put work papers up there, and attach spreadsheets. That has worked great because when I'm doing financial statements, I need to make some adjusting entries to an account." With supporting documentation, he saves time and avoids having to try to remember why he did what he did, he says.

Remote Access

Having a cloud-based system was paramount during the pandemic, Scott says. The construction firm was able to keep operating while competitors on legacy on-premises systems struggled to work remotely. Carma Group also minimized its technology spend with the cloud platform.

"When you're that small, you just don't have the infrastructure in human capital or otherwise to have a full server set up," he says, "and all the things that go with that – backups, redundancy, power supplies and networking interfaces."

"If it's on the cloud, it's just simply done. I don't have to worry about updates and taking the server offline. With Acumatica, it just happens."



“ Instead of bending your ways to the way the ERP system works, it's so easy to change Acumatica to accommodate the way you are used to. ”

– Bob Scott,
Chief Financial Officer,
Carma Group

Continuous Scalability

With Acumatica Construction, Carma Group now has a platform upon which to scale indefinitely. Scott says the company could continue to grow astronomically as Las Vegas casinos, sporting and other entertainment venues continue to upgrade their facilities. And he'll continue to do his part providing actionable intelligence.

Given what he's witnessed by attending Acumatica's Summits, he is confident that Acumatica is a dynamic company with a mission to truly help its customers.

"We build great, amazing things here in Las Vegas," Scott says. "Acumatica lets me do that because it's constantly improving, constantly taking development cues from its users and implementing them. I can see what the future holds. I can see what the things they're working on, and I love leveraging the things it's doing to make my job easier, smarter, better, and faster."

While Scott says he doesn't directly affect the top line or revenues, with Acumatica, he provides team members precise data allowing Carma to grow. "I give project managers actionable intelligence enough that I can help with margin, which does affect gross profit," he says. "Acumatica let us do what we do best – accounting, numbers and data – so we do what we do best."

Adds Angie Rowe, co-founder, "Acumatica has brought us the ability to organize everything where it needs to be. It has been invaluable to have Acumatica as we grew and to be able to handle our growth versus stunting it if we stayed in a small company mentality."

