

Hickory Home and Garden

Spruce Software Helps Keep Garden Center Growing and Secure after a Cyber Attack



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 📍 Hickory, North Carolina



After using Spruce® business management software from ECI Software Solutions for more than 10 years, the folks at Hickory Home and Garden Center in Hickory, North Carolina, have a pretty good idea of the benefits ECI's software system offers LBM operations.

The company's office manager, who boasts an accounting career that began in the early 1980s, describes Spruce as the easiest program she's ever used to handle the financial side of a business.

Spruce software for home centers has been the catalyst to doubling sales and expansion into new product categories

Aaron Poland, another veteran with over 20 years at the company, says Spruce is a key reason why Hickory Home and Garden has more than doubled sales in the past five years while only adding three more full-time employees—going from 15 to 18.

It's also why, he says, the company has been able to expand successfully into new product categories. Sales of power tools have risen from \$800-\$1,200 per year five years ago to close to \$150,000 per year today. Fertilizer and grass seed sales have risen from about \$8,000-\$9,000 per year three years ago to \$90,000 per year today.

Growth on that scale without careful management of the basics can often cause serious cash flow and/or profitability problems. But that has never been a concern at Hickory Home and Garden thanks to Spruce, says Poland.

As the business grew more complex, Spruce software made growth management simple

"We have a very diverse mix of products and services and we are able to run just about all of it with Spruce," he reports. "Spruce makes it easy for us to track inventory, make sure our pricing is where it needs to be, and deliver superior customer service, whether it's to our retail walk-in trade, general contractors, or specialty landscapers in our market. Spruce takes what could be a very complicated business and makes it simple for us."

A vicious ransomware attack made the threat of cybercrime a painful reality

If all of that wasn't enough, adds Poland, Spruce software has given him and the rest of the Hickory Home and Garden Center team something that in many ways is even more valuable: a far greater sense of security against the growing threat of cybercrime.

Poland still has vivid memories of what happened at the company on September 29, 2017. "It was the day before the end of our fiscal year and we were getting ready to close out the books," he recalls. The only problem: when Poland and the rest of the team came in to open for business that day, they found themselves victims of a vicious ransomware attack.

"None of our computers would come up and the main server was showing an 'Unable to find the C Drive' message," reports Poland. Not only were all the files on the server encrypted but the attack had also encrypted everything on the external hard drive the company used as a backup.

"We were able to get email, though, and that's how the attackers told us how we could pay for the decryption code that would give us our files back," he reports.

Unlike many cybercrime stories, this one ended happily

Fortunately, in addition to the external hard drive backup, the company also did a daily backup to a flash drive. Without the data on that drive, this story would have ended very differently.

"We had been thinking about moving to the cloud-based version of Spruce for a while before all this happened, but the ransomware attack made it clear the time for just thinking was over," Poland explains.

The average time to convert from the on-premise version of Spruce to the cloud-based version is two weeks. Urgent cases, for example those involving ransomware, however, are prioritized to help these customers get their businesses back online quickly.

"I called Spruce, told them the situation and they couldn't have been more responsive," he says. The ransomware attack came on a Friday and by the following Monday, Hickory Home and Garden was up on the cloud and back live again with Spruce, with all their data loaded and accessible.

Spruce's people were just as invaluable as the software

"Spruce really came through for us when we needed them," says Poland. "They provided a dedicated support person who set up each computer remotely and made sure everything worked properly. They even made it possible to add our company logo to our receipts and charge tickets when they print out."

The move to cloud-based Spruce provided confidence and convenience

"Before we moved to the cloud, I would always have to go in early or stay late to do software updates and other maintenance. But now that's a thing of the past," Poland happily reports. "Not only do we have more time to spend on what's important for the business, but now we can be confident that we're protected against ransomware attacks, spyware, viruses, and all the other online threats out there."

Thanks to Spruce business software and the responsiveness of the Spruce customer service and technical support teams, Poland and his team have taken what could have been a disastrous situation and given it a happy ending.

By moving to the cloud, they can focus on growing the business and expanding their product mix and customer base without having to worry about online threats that can cause the company major long-term damage.