

Resilience personified: How Eskew Dumez Ripple revitalized its business with Unanet AE ERP

Motivation for Seeking a New ERP Solution

New Orleans possesses a vibrant culture – a culture embraced by the people and businesses that inhabit this one-of-a-kind city. One of the businesses most emblematic of that signature New Orleans soul and spirit is Eskew Dumez Ripple, a New Orleans-based architecture and design firm that has seen its home city through good times and bad.

Founded in 1989 by Allen Eskew, the individual who led the design team for the 1984 World's Fair, the firm saw itself and the rest of the city in disarray following 2005's Hurricane Katrina. But rather than accept defeat, the firm, and its people, rallied together. "Our mission, our vision, our philosophy," said Jenifer Navard, Eskew Dumez Ripple's Director of Finance, "is that we build places for people." Defined by its resilience, the firm bounced back.

Focused on its primary purpose to support its clients and its community, Eskew Dumez Ripple wasn't just one of the first businesses to return following the catastrophe. It also played a vital role in helping sustain other businesses as the city got back on its collective feet.

Facing significant – though not unique – financial challenges after its successful return, Eskew Dumez Ripple found itself needing an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution that could provide its principals and project staff with the essential information they'd need to oversee their projects.

This is the story of how one of the firm's key leaders emerged and identified the right ERP solution to help Eskew Dumez Ripple mount a remarkable comeback story.

The Challenges

Before joining Eskew Dumez Ripple, Navard helped multiple firms navigate complex processes in the past, but this challenge was a critical one: to identify an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution that acts as a single and trustworthy source of truth for the company's financial data while painting a compelling, easily understandable picture of what that data meant to the organization.

Eskew Dumez Ripple⁺

Founded in 1989 and located in the heart of New Orleans, Louisiana, Eskew Dumez Ripple is an esteemed architecture and design firm renowned for its exquisite designs that pay homage to local aesthetics while fostering vibrant life within and around them. Their work seamlessly merges interiors and buildings with the broader context of neighborhoods and communities, displaying their proficiency in handling projects of all scales.

Their legacy enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution fell short in several crucial aspects. It lacked the adoption rate, capabilities, accessibility, and user-friendliness necessary to provide timely, accurate insights that could drive better business decisions and promote sustainable growth.

Navard knew the firm required modernized, tech-forward tools to help its leaders quickly understand the status and progress of its projects while maintaining accurate, reliable financial data.

She ran into numerous challenges using their legacy ERP system, including:

- **An inability to get information out in a format that enabled timely decision-making.** Eskew Dumez Ripple's legacy ERP provider wasn't generating information in a format the firm could use to make the right decisions at the right time. "One of the struggles we've had is that the tools we used created lag time," said Christian Rodriguez, an Eskew Dumez Ripple Principal and Architect. They needed a system that could deliver timely indicators for projects that weren't on track.
- **Having to create reports in disparate systems.** Using her previous solution, Navard was forced to create reports in multiple other platforms (e.g., Excel), manually inputting information. This was a painstaking process that increased the likelihood of data entry errors.
- **Project managers didn't have the information they needed.** The lack of a single source of truth for the firm's project and financial information kept the firm's project managers from managing their projects effectively. This led to even more financial issues, as project data was less than dependable and not arriving when the firm needed it. Commenting on the firm's legacy solutions, Navard noted that "data's no good when it's two weeks old."
- **Data and reports that were hard to understand and process.** "I work with architects," said Navard. "They're visually driven people. Very quickly, coming to this industry I realized the worst thing you can do is give an architect a page with a bunch of numbers on it. Everything I do has to be graphically generated, easy to read, and understand." Crafting visually driven reports for architects had always been challenging for the firm due to its legacy ERP, a hurdle they aspired to overcome. "Architects are really good at juggling lots of variables," said Rodriguez, adding, "what we're not good at is going through numbers with a fine-tooth comb. If you can present [information] in one graphic in one place at one time, we can rock with it," said Rodriguez.
- **Implementation was a pain.** Eskew Dumez Ripple had struggled with implementing both hardware and software solutions in the past, thus making the exercise of finding suitable replacements crucial, yet daunting.

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With Unanet, our project managers can see exactly what is happening inside their projects. How many hours are left based on fee, how many people they have scheduled...Unanet gives them the information they need to be successful.

— Jenifer Navard, Principal, Director of Finance, Eskew Dumez Ripple

The Solution

Navard had spearheaded more than a few difficult implementations in the past, so she knew exactly the type of solution the company would need and how to navigate the process. Enter Unanet AE ERP – a solution that gave Navard and her firm the ability to build a better business in the short-term while supporting growth in the long-term.

After searching for a new system, Eskew Dumez Ripple chose Unanet. The solution was purpose-built for a firm like theirs and it helped them make stunning leaps in how effective the firm could be.

- **Deliver information in a way that best suits the firm's needs.** The firm was drawn in by the graphics and visuals generated with Unanet's analytics and reporting functionality. Unanet's ability to present crystal-clear insights through simple visuals was a perfect match for Eskew Dumez Ripple's primary audience of architects, who want to see results in a way they can easily process and envision.
- **Maintain the integrity of its financial information.** Known for its single source of truth model, Unanet helped Eskew Dumez Ripple organize its financial and accounting data, creating a more accurate common operating picture for everyone to use and trust. "With Unanet we have one source of truth to help us pay attention to the right information at the right time," said Navard.
- **Equip project managers with all the project insights they would need to do their jobs.** The firm's project leaders no longer had to scramble to gather data – now, they had the information they needed in one place, allowing for more efficient management, better decisions, and improved project delivery. "If I'm spending all my time generating information, I can't spend my time helping people understand what it means," said Navard. "You don't want to know at month 12 that you've overspent on your project. You need to know at month one, two, or three- and Unanet helps us stay ahead in that respect."
- **Enable a smooth transition.** Unanet's demonstrated capability for a seamless implementation meant that Eskew Dumez Ripple could transition without having to overhaul their operational processes.



Unanet has been a game changer for us. Everybody knows how to use it. And not only do we deliver on projects with confidence, we are now able to sustain and grow in a way that aligns with our vision, purpose, and goals for the future.

– Christian Rodriguez, Principal, Architect, Eskew Dumez Ripple

The Approach

In previous roles, Navard had collaborated with firms who had experienced less than ideal implementations of new solutions, so she knew what it took to succeed. Her goal with this implementation was for the team to not realize a change was even happening beyond the systems they were logging into.

Luckily, that proved to be a simple task with Unanet. With Navard as the firm's ace in the hole as an implementation expert and a platform that enabled a smooth transition, they took the following approach:

- **Enact a fast-paced yet error-free transition.** The implementation process was expedited and completed within a few months, without any loss or distortion of data.
- **Stick with one system to ensure cost and time efficiency.** Navard made the savvy decision of not running multiple systems during the transition to Unanet, thereby saving both time and money. "We simplified our approach, and I didn't run parallel. We saved ourselves a lot of money, time, and angst by doing that."
- **Embrace the new solution.** Because the firm found Unanet so useful, the adoption process was seamless, and the business benefits were quickly realized. "Everything was redesigned to maximize what our new system could do," said Navard. "The whole point of going to a new system is to do it in a new, different, better way. Unanet made this a reality for us."
- **Ensure the solution is well-suited for continuous improvement.** Navard noted that the firm needed a solution that placed its emphasis on continuous improvement. They found that with Unanet. "We're never content with things as they are now," said Navard. "We were looking for a system that could grow with us and that would continue to improve as we continue to improve the firm. We found that with Unanet."

The Impact

With its new ERP solution in place, Eskew Dumez Ripple was able to experience a new, enhanced level of organization and project management visibility that helped streamline its operations. Today, the firm's project managers depend heavily on their dashboards. The financial situation has been rectified, and Unanet is being utilized to influence the firm's strategic direction and growth trajectory.

The firm observed the following positive impacts:

- **A single home for critical firm data meant everyone worked from the same set of information.** Unanet's ability to provide Eskew Dumez Ripple with a single source of truth was a major selling point. "That's my personal preference when it comes to financial and accounting data," said Navard. "I only like having to enter data into one system. Having the 'cradle to grave' integration was helpful." After tirelessly downloading data from Excel and using multiple systems to manipulate that data into reports, the firm went with one easy to use system – Unanet.
- **Automated, interactive visualizations and enhanced reporting.** The use of Unanet has automated the creation of interactive, visual graphics and dashboards thereby eliminating the need for manual data manipulation and providing a boost to their reporting and decision-making capabilities. Everyone within the firm is now empowered with data represented in an interactive, easy-to-understand format, without having to move in and out of disparate systems to do that. "In the past, I had to manipulate data to generate reports," said Navard. "Unanet gave me the opportunity to not do that."

- **Strong adoption with project managers.** A solution is only as valuable if it helps the people it is intended to help. With Unanet, Eskew Dumez Ripple succeeded in that regard. The firm's project managers saw the new software as a major value add as evidenced by their willingness to jump right in, adopting it from the start. Soon after implementation, Eskew Dumez Ripple saw strong adoption of Unanet among its project managers. Unanet and Navard worked together to ensure the adoption process was smooth and easy for project managers. "Project managers could easily see what was happening inside their projects," said Navard, "having that information was an easy-button for gaining their adoption."
- **Allowing architects to focus on the work that mattered most.** Between Navard's experience and Unanet's utility as a purpose-built solution, the rest of the team at Eskew Dumez Ripple spent less time managing and handling information and more time focused on what they do best. "The more you can take off our plate with software, the more that we can do the impactful work we need in the community through architecture," said Rodriguez, adding, "That's a huge win for everybody."
- **A true partner.** Rather than simply prescribe solutions to the team at Eskew Dumez Ripple, Unanet listened to the firm's needs and adapted to fit its situation. "What I found with Unanet was a set of collaborators. They listened to our feedback, and I've seen actual changes happen based on the feedback I've provided."

Once again, Navard and Eskew Dumez Ripple were able to highlight the firm's resilience with Unanet serving as a key component of that story. The transformation experienced by Eskew Dumez Ripple under Jenifer's leadership has been remarkable, with the introduction of Unanet as an ERP solution bringing about significant changes to the firm's financial standing and project management capabilities. Unanet helped them solidify the firm's operations today while paving the way for a future focused on growth.

No longer are project managers left in the dark – essential information is now at their fingertips. The financial challenges that once loomed large have been replaced with a strategic approach to growth, guided by Unanet's robust enhanced project data visibility. As the firm continues on its path of sustainable development, Unanet remains a pivotal part of the firm's new era of efficiency and data-driven decision-making.



Where Information Means Insight

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