

# NewFields Leaves their Legacy ERP and Finds Greener – As In More Profitable – Pastures with Unanet's Modern Solution

## Motivation for Seeking a New ERP Solution

When Eric Salnas, CPA, took the job as Chief Financial Officer at NewFields, little did he know he'd be walking into a morass of manual work created by the firm's antiquated enterprise resource planning (ERP) system.

Some people were taping hard-copy receipts together and forwarding them to accounts payable. Others were printing, annotating and scanning client invoices by hand to send to accounting. Members of the accounting team would manually review every single timesheet because entries were error-prone and could cause invoicing and reporting issues downstream. And these issues were just the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the surface lurked deeper and, for the business, more troubling problems that Salnas traced directly back to the firm's antiquated ERP systems.

## The Challenge

- **Limited trust in the numbers.** Inside and outside the accounting department, says Salnas, reports were met with skepticism because people "didn't believe in the [accuracy of the] data" on which the reports were based.
- **Too many errors and manual processes turned people against the ERP system,** resulting in **poor adoption by non-accountants** across the firm
- **The firm was leaving project profitability on the table due to a lack of insight into job costs.** Firm decision-makers were using intuition rather than data when it came to calculating overhead, resource utilization, break-even point and other factors that are critical to enhancing profitability.

## NewFields

*NewFields ([www.newfields.com](http://www.newfields.com)) is a global environmental, engineering and construction management consulting firm whose areas of specialization range from environmental engineering and renewable energy to mining design and construction management.*

*Founded in 1995, the 350+-person firm is headquartered in Atlanta, Ga., and has 19 offices in the U.S., Canada, Mexico and the U.K. It serves clients in a variety of industries, including mining, oil & gas, chemicals, pharmaceuticals and transportation, and has completed projects in 70 countries.*

- **The accounting team was buried by data requests**, “putting a lot of stress on the team” and creating **information logjams** across the business.
- **Way too much time and energy were wasted to get invoices right.** Numerous invoices – the firm issues about 450 of them each month – would trigger a volley of emails between project managers and accounting. “Thousands of emails each month,” says Salnas “Imagine what that costs.”
- **Data bottlenecks stifled collaboration.** A lack of trusted, timely data from the ERP system created friction instead of harmony between the firm's local offices and its central office.

## The ERP Solution

The organization selected Unanet ERP AE because:

- **Unanet's best-in-class service and support.** From the outset of their dialogue with the Unanet team, Salnas says he and other NewFields selection team committee members felt Unanet treated them as a true technology and business ally, consistently demonstrating a willingness to support the firm every step of the way, through implementation and beyond.
- **Unanet's specialized expertise and experience in ERP for engineering/consulting firms.** Asked during the final interview to explain how they would troubleshoot a particularly complex billing issue, the Unanet team “blew us away” with its on-the-spot innovation. “That was the deciding factor,” says Salnas.
- **Unanet's automations** in areas like payroll and invoicing were a must to reduce manual overload, and **built-in alerts** would help keep the business running smoothly.
- **Unanet ERP AE's seamless integration with other key business software.** Via the Unanet Connect integrations marketplace, NewFields gained access to a comprehensive library of application connectors to build out their digital ecosystem.

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*We saw a more than 100% increase in quarterly profit at one of our offices, and I can say with certainty that was a direct result of people trusting, then acting upon, the data and insights they are now getting from Unanet ERP AE on job costing, break-even points and other project KPIs.*

**Eric Salnas**  
**CFO, NewFields**

## Impact

- **Quick ROI.** The switch in ERP systems took a ton of unnecessary manual work off the NewFields accounting team's plate, enabling the firm to run a much leaner billing staff while capturing other efficiencies that went straight to the bottom line.
- **Increased visibility + trust in the numbers = increased profitability.** Profitability jumped almost immediately across NewFields offices, including a more than 100% increase in quarterly profit at one office. Salnas gives a lot of credit to Unanet for this, saying that people trusting the data Unanet ERP AE was feeding them about job costing, utilization targets, break-even points and other key project KPIs gave them the confidence to make the decisions (changes to billing rates etc.) that they needed to make to increase profitability.
- **Scaling is easy.** Now NewFields can readily reallocate resources as workload expands and contracts. Scaling up and down is merely a matter of adding or subtracting software licenses.
- **A sharp increase in adoption among project managers and others across the business, the result of a vastly improved user experience.** PMs and others feel empowered and inspired by Unanet ERP AE because they can see job costs, they can generate AR reports themselves and they can create and configure interactive dashboards to track the relevant data that enables them to do their jobs better.
- **Better decision-making across the business.** Instead of going on gut instinct alone, partners, PMs and other key decision-makers now use trusted real-time data plus their own business acumen to guide the firm and its projects.
- **NewFields PMs can respond faster and deliver better service to clients.** Current, easy-to-understand project-related reports and dashboards help clients visualize key project data.
- **A cultural rallying point and catalyst to collaboration.** People have bought into Unanet AE ERP wholeheartedly, having experienced what it's like to trust the numbers and the system, to have data at their fingertips, and to be able to focus on higher-value work without all the manual intervention. "Unanet is that common denominator in our firm that everyone seems to care about," Salnas observe



*By moving to Unanet ERP AE instead of just continuing with our prior ERP provider's products, people got the message that, yes, we are serious about giving them the tools they need to work smarter, not longer. Unanet has become a cultural rallying point and a catalyst for collaboration across the business, from our field offices to the central office.*

**Eric Salnas, CFO, NewFields**



*Our accounting people and project managers were sending thousands of emails back and forth each month to try to get invoices right. Imagine what that costs — and how much time we're saving now that it's all automated with Unanet AE.*

— Eric Salnas, CFO, NewFields

## Keys to Success

- **Being open to change.** There's too much at stake from a competitiveness standpoint to stick with legacy software that's holding your firm back. Remember, it's only a solution if it helps you solve business problems.
- **Developing a detailed but flexible implementation plan** that plots the various steps involved in migration and other key processes – what's supposed to happen, when, and who is involved.
- **Focusing on user adoption.** Having best-in-class software means little if people don't actually engage with it; therefore, communicate and communicate some more, explaining to all employees who may be touched by the ERP system the justification for using the system and how it can help them do their jobs better. Show them the training and education resources to which they have access and encourage self-sufficiency by motivating them to explore the software and its tools/functionalities.
- **Finding a true business and technology ally for the long haul, rather than just settling for a software vendor.** With your ERP investment, you should expect an actively engaged support team, ready access to subject-matter experts, deep education and training resources, and a direct feedback loop in which the provider welcomes, listens to and acts upon customer input.
- **Managing expectations.** Instead of promising massive, life-changing improvements from the outset, start by showing people small wins to build momentum and confidence in the system. "Pick a fair pace," suggests Salnas, "and set realistic targets."



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