



Kiva Kitchen & Bath: A Conversion Connection

There's a big difference between four months and four days. And, the time it takes to get up and running after a conversion affects both customers and employees alike. Kiva Kitchen & Bath learned this first-hand when they chose Zerion for the second phase of their Eclipse conversion. With better training and consulting, Kiva was able to derive the benefits of Eclipse - and get back to full, customer-pleasing capacity - in a much shorter timeframe than their previous install.

OVERVIEW

Company: Kiva Kitchen & Bath

Headquarters: Houston, TX

Locations: 13

Annual Revenue: \$100 million

In Business Since: 1937

Industry: Retail Sales and Installation

Products: Appliances, Decorative Plumbing & Hardware, Cabinets, Countertops and Fireplaces

Employees: 250

Project Type: Eclipse Conversion

Goals: To get up and running faster, and have a smoother install than their previous experience.

Challenges: A customer with a distaste for conversions, and a lack of confidence in consultants.

Takeaway: The consultants and trainers responsible for an implementation are a key factor in the success of the install.

“The end result after the conversion far, far exceeded our expectations! These kinds of conversions rarely go smoothly, but this one went with hardly any problems whatsoever. Zerion deserves all of the credit for that.”

**Tom Maples,
VP Operations**

SUCCESS STORY

Software installations are difficult and challenging. They require much coordination, effort and involvement from management and employees. And, they often result in a slowdown of service and annoyed customers. It's the nature of the beast. Or is it?

Kiva Kitchen & Bath has grown by acquisition, so their 13 branches were operating on a variety of legacy software platforms. They chose to move to Activant Eclipse, and are doing so with a phased approach. The first three branches went live in November 2007 (converting from Storis). While Kiva was excited about the benefits of the new system, the conversion was a crippling experience for their business. The operation was severely impacted for days, and it was months before the employees were truly up and running.

Tom Maples, VP of operations at Kiva, said, “I can't even begin to put an estimate on the cost of being shut down for a week, let alone a month to get really functional, and four months to be where you're comfortable.”

Customer Success Story

Because Kiva works primarily with home builders, the downtime resulted in missed house closings and thousands of dollars in re-scheduling fees. Tom also estimated that about a million dollars worth of business was delayed in the first week after go-live.

New Horizons

In November 2009, Kiva was planning to put three more branches on-line (from TylerNet). While they knew there had to be a better way, they were still skeptical of conversions and were quite concerned about the transition.

Once Tom connected with Zerion's Tony King, he began to feel more encouraged about the upcoming project. He said, "In talking to Tony, we decided that this was a guy who could probably make our conversion better. And, that's exactly what he did. He personalized it to our company. He came in and consulted. He asked questions and listened to the answers. He had the wherewithal to say, 'yes it [Eclipse] can do this,' or 'no it can't do that.' And, he even offered his opinions, which is what a consultant is supposed to do. He truly partnered with us."

Kiva contracted Zerion to manage the install, including training, documentation, data conversion, project management and post-live support.

"He [Tony] actually asked questions about our business to learn how we did things and why we did them; and, he tried to make Eclipse match that business model. That's why we're using Zerion again."

Let's Talk About Training

For Tom, the most important aspect of the project was training. He knew his branch associates needed a solid understanding of the system before go-live.

Zerion always provides training that is customized to the client and is based on how the system will work for that particular operation. For Kiva, this was an important difference from their previous conversion. "The number one improvement was the immediate up-time," said Tom. "The people who were coming onto Eclipse for the first time were up and running much sooner than our original conversion. They were also much more knowledgeable and the training that they received was what I would call 'Kiva-ized'. It wasn't generic training, 'here's how Eclipse works'. It was 'here's how Kiva uses Eclipse'."



This difference has proven to be a long-term benefit for the three branches in the most recent conversion. Tom noted, "The employees who came on Eclipse with the Zerion implementation are actually better users than the people who have been using it for three years. The training was more focused and more on-topic for how we use the system."

"[Training] was the single biggest thing that Zerion improved. Training and go-live is always the most painful part of the transition. But, it was impeccable! It was awesome! About as smooth a transition as you can get. Manuals, documentation and actual execution of training were by far the strongest thing."

Conversion Benefits

Tom and his team also benefited from Zerion's approach to data conversion. "On our first install, we elected to convert all of our sales history and also to convert our open book of business ... At Zerion's urging and leadership, we abandoned that strategy," remarked Tom.

Zerion did not have Kiva convert any sales history or open orders, as they believe that the old system usually contains a lot of old or bad information. Instead, they recommend that salespeople come into the branch on the weekend of the conversion and hand-key all of their open orders. Tom said, "One: if you're having to key in all orders and bids, you're only going to key in ones that are good. All garbage was left behind. Second: what a great way for training. They had just gone through a week of training, and now here they are really doing orders. You don't have to wait for a customer to walk through the door. So that was a huge difference and all Zerion's idea."

The actual conversion was a success as well, with the staff at Kiva's three branches feeling comfortable over just one weekend, as opposed to months.

“Zerion mapped out the timeline, the process and the data conversion. They appropriately trained our people so that in minute-one they could use the system efficiently and effectively. We were thrilled with the result coming out the other side. We were beyond happy with how it went.”

Tom explained his satisfaction with the conversion in his own words:

“Here’s our experience with Zerion: we turned off the old system on a Wednesday. We converted data Thursday and Friday. We brought salespeople in on a Saturday and they entered all of their orders and bids. On Monday morning we resumed business as normal. It’s a stunning difference.”

Zerion also was able to provide some operational consulting throughout the conversion process, and recommend improvements for Kiva. “They gave us countless suggestions on better ways to do things, many of which we adopted,” noted Tom.

ERP Success

Most important, Kiva is now reaping the benefits of having a robust ERP system like Eclipse functioning across multiple locations. They’ve streamlined inventory because they can share and transfer product between all of the branches and warehouses that are on-line. Tom said, “We reduced inventory by about 12% overall. We sped our turnover from 11 to 12. And, we were previously doing zero dollars of inter-warehouse transfers; whereas, now we’re doing 10,000 – 20,000 per week.”

Kiva now is able to centralize purchasing and approach it more strategically, because more branches means bigger volumes and more discounts. “We’re more efficient by being able to price products properly because we have global matrixes loaded in,” said Tom. “And, we can adjust price on a region-by-region basis depending on what’s happening in the marketplace.”

Their sales management has also improved. Kiva’s sales staff is managing customers in different regions of the state, which wasn’t possible before. Their average time to input sales orders has decreased. And, the ability to manage their portfolio of business is enhanced through the calling queues and reminder tools that Eclipse has built in.

Future Partnership

Considering all of the benefits they’ve seen from increasing the number of branches on the system, and their renewed faith in software conversions, Kiva plans to put more branches on Eclipse this year. Tom explained, “We have selected Zerion to steward us through the new conversion, which is one warehouse and three selling branches in the Dallas area.” He added, “My expectation is that this one will go every bit as well as last year’s.”

Zerion is excited to continue helping Kiva; and, though the expectations will be high, they look forward to another set of successful conversions. Tony and the Zerion team are confident they’ve proven to Kiva that disappointed customers, stressed managers and frustrated

employees are *not* the nature of the beast.

“They’ve set a high bar. Our last conversion went so well that at this point I only hope to match it. I’m not really sure you could exceed it. It really went that well.”