



NORTH|STAR™

UTILITIES SOLUTIONS

Case Study

Bedford, VA Scraps

All-in-One CIS Module

for Best-of-Breed Solution

After Implementation Shortfalls.

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Located between Roanoke and Lynchburg, The Town of Bedford, VA serves 7600 electric and refuse customers. Their utility billing software was aging and reaching its end of life. And they were unsure whether to choose a best of breed or an all-in-one solution for their Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and utility billing software. Unfortunately, implementation delays and failure to address the Town's complex billing led to keeping the ERP but scrapping the CIS module for NorthStar's best-of-breed CIS.



The Town of Bedford, VA Needs a New CIS Software.

Although it had served The Town of Bedford well for many years, their CIS software was aging. And the IT staff at the time had not taken steps to keep the software up to date. Knowing the software would not last forever, the Town researched options. An all-in-one ERP solution with a CIS module seemed like the best choice. Keeping payroll, financials, and utility billing integrated would make information processing and reporting much more manageable than the way the Town was currently working.

Challenges Began with Implementation.

From the beginning, the all-in-one solution project support was lacking. The project manager was often inattentive and unprepared for meetings, which dismayed the Town staff. And they had to reiterate requests and topics discussed in previous sessions. At one point, the project's SharePoint files were even deleted, causing the Town's staff to backtrack and resubmit all of the information previously provided to the vendor from memory or having to piece together the deleted work from project notes.

[At each meeting] we always felt like we started over every time we talked to [the project manager], and we were going over things we had gone over weeks before. It felt like they had us confused with somebody else every time we came to the table.

Promises Made; Challenges Created.

Initially, The Town of Bedford was excited to have software that would streamline operations, cost less, and provide one point of contact. The all-in-one provider promised a solution that would be the answer to all their challenges, right out of the box. But as the project progressed, that was just not the case. As with most utilities, The Town of Bedford has complex billing tasks. And they must be automated flawlessly to provide accurate monthly billing to their customers. But, implementation created more challenges than solutions, costing the Town time and money.

The First Challenge

The first challenge was the gross receipts tax. The legacy software combined these three rates into one service. But the all-in-one provider's out-the-box solution was to separate it into three services. Now, anyone with one meter would have three new service lines on their account. And for anyone with more than one meter, the number of gross receipts service lines multiplied by 3. What used to be a simple line item could now be up to 15 service lines! When The Town of Bedford asked if the provider could consolidate these rates into one service, the provider told them that they would have to customize the software, which would cost more time and money.

The Second Challenge

The second challenge had the utility billing team scratching their heads. To calculate a multiplier of 1000, the utility billing staff had to input the number "10,000" or the new software would not calculate it correctly. The utility billing team couldn't understand the necessity of this workaround because their legacy software didn't need this extra step. But, when they asked the provider to fix it, the provider said that's how they had designed the software. Now, the utility billing team would have to work harder at what was once a simple task.

The Third Challenge or The Straw that Broke the Camel's Back

With 300+ rates and a large capacity customer, The Town needed to automate its billing. Manual input and any workarounds would waste time, money and could lead to billing errors. Good CIS software is designed to handle complex rates, not create more work for the utility billing staff.

The straw that broke the camel's back was when they told us that they couldn't calculate our large capacity rates. We were going to have to make a manual adjustment every month. And that could be handled with an upgrade, but that upgrade could take a year or so to get that in place.

And when the utility billing supervisor, Rachel Whorley, repeatedly explained their complex rates to the all-in-one provider, she was assured they could handle them time and again. But, with each delay and broken promise, the Town began to question whether the all-in-one provider was too new to utility billing and did not have the expertise to handle complex electric utility rates.

As implementation continued, the new software didn't live up to what the provider promised. Finally, the provider told the team they would have to manually enter the high-capacity customer's rates. If the software was customized, it would handle the rates, but that would take more time and money. And that was when The Town of Bedford's utility billing team had finally had enough.

Why The Town of Bedford Chose NorthStar CIS

It may have cost The Town of Bedford more to cancel the CIS implementation project, but they felt it was worth it. With all the delays and the broken promises, the utility billing team couldn't risk having the all-in-one software customized and then not live up to their expectations. Good CIS software makes utility billing easier and delivers flawless utility bills each month without fail.

From start to finish, the NorthStar team handled the implementation project professionally. The Town's team members felt their time was valued and their concerns were heard. NorthStar's project manager kept everything on point. The Town's team members had goals and homework to move the project forward. And every NorthStar team member was on time for every meeting, and the high-level team members were always available.

After implementation, NorthStar's CIS handled the Town's three challenges with ease. As NorthStar team members trained the Town's utility billing team, they showed ways for staff members to save time and ultimately save money. Everyone in the utility billing industry knows that utility bills should be correct and accurate. And with NorthStar CIS, Bedford community members will get utility bills that are right, month after month, without the team performing complex workarounds or having software that cannot automate manual tasks.



Peaks of Otter Winery



**Peaks of Otter
and
Smith Mountain Lake**

The Town of Bedford's utility billing staff can't praise the NorthStar customer support team enough. Because the Town uses the all-in-one provider's ERP, they know not all support teams answer support tickets quickly. And, the all-in-one provider's ticket may sit for weeks before a solution is found, if at all. The Town will usually get an answer from NorthStar within the day. And when confronted with a problem, the NorthStar support team says, let's fix it and make it right, or here's a way to make it work better for you. With NorthStar, you won't get answers like that's how the software works, and you'll have to find your own solution.

The team at NorthStar is truly knowledgeable, and they are very willing to help you solve any situation you may have. Even in our training, the trainer was able to work out a solution for us that would save us time.

Utility billing is one of the most challenging rate structures. It looks easy to calculate, but it's extraordinarily complex. When each person on a given street may have a different rate, or large-capacity customers are a factor, the software needs to make it easier for a utility billing team to issue bills each month, not harder. The Town of Bedford is still using an all-in-one solution for financials, but NorthStar's CIS and customer support team exceed the Town's expectations in every way. Although the Town pulls the general ledger over each month to synchronize their two software systems, this process takes much less time than manually inputting their large-capacity customer's rates. And the utility billing team knows that when they send out bills each month, they will be correct.



National D-Day Memorial

Sometimes you get what you pay for. When you bill your utility customers, the bills need to be right ...we can always count on NorthStar to get our customers' bills right.

The Results

The project was handled professionally and moved swiftly to its conclusion. Now that NorthStar CIS is in place, The Town of Bedford knows that their bills are right, and when they have a question and need support, it will be handled quickly with options on how to solve the problem.

The Complete Customer Experience Solution

We're focused on helping modern utilities leverage technology to automate operations and deliver consistent customer experiences across every touchpoint. For utilities who invest in today for tomorrow, NorthStar offers affordable and modular solutions that scale as your organization's needs evolve.

NorthStar CIS may be optionally enhanced with value-add modules for mobile workforce management, consumer engagement, business intelligence, and more. Each of which integrates seamlessly with NorthStar CIS to deliver exceptional customer service experiences.

**Ready to see what a best-of-breed CIS suite
can do for your community?**



**Schedule
Your Demo**

NORTH|STAR™
UTILITIES SOLUTIONS
**Customer Experience Is at the Heart
of Everything We Do.**

**Customer Information & Billing, Workforce Management, Customer Engagement,
Managed Detection & Response, and Managed Cloud Hosting**