

Blackfoot Communications Leaps From Regulated Past to Cloud-Enabled Future

CASE STUDY



armanino 

At A Glance

Customer Profile:

Headquartered in Missoula, Montana, Blackfoot Communications has more than 65 years of experience in creating strong connections for homes, businesses and communities. With deregulation in the telecommunications industry, Blackfoot was looking to restructure its general ledger to a GAAP structure. Given the extensive changes needed, the company decided it was an ideal time to begin a cloud transformation of its critical systems. With Armanino's help, the company quickly implemented a new financial and operations solution, replacing multiple siloed and end-of-life systems.

Services

- Armanino consulting and implementation services
- Microsoft Dynamics 365 for Finance and Operations

Benefits

- Saved the equivalent of 4 full-time staff across the financial, information systems and engineering groups
- Saved 4 days of labor distribution per month on average
- Reimagined and replaced business processes with best practices and eliminated silos for cross-departmental processes

Challenge

Founded in 1954, [Blackfoot Communications](#) serves homes in western Montana and eastern Idaho, as well as businesses of all sizes throughout the western United States, using the latest technology in voice, broadband, network and managed services to keep people reliably connected. Named after the Blackfoot River, the company has fostered a reputation based on innovative technology solutions, exceptional customer service and community involvement.

With deregulation of the telecommunications industry, Blackfoot was preparing to make a major change to its general ledger when it hired Lori Parker as director of accounting. "In looking at the significant move required to go from a regulated general ledger to a GAAP structure, I soon realized that our existing accounting and enterprise resource planning software was essentially end-of-life," she says. "Given the heavy lift of the restructuring, the timing was right to move to a modern, cloud-based solution for our financial software."

It turned out that other software packages used to run the business were also considered legacy and/or end-of-life, including asset and project (work order) management, time entry, labor distribution and others. "From a systems standpoint, we had taken an on-premises, best-of-breed approach in the past," says Jessica Bracey, business solutions strategist at Blackfoot. "Given that some of our software was more than 20 years old, it seemed like the perfect opportunity to not only move to a new financial system but also begin our cloud transformation."

When Beau Bailey, Blackfoot's finance and purchasing manager, suggested, "Why don't we just blow it all up?" the original project to replace the accounting system suddenly morphed into a broader transformation initiative. "On-premises systems were part of our regulatory past," says Barb Honken, senior systems integration analyst at Blackfoot. "The cloud is our competitive future."

Solution

After evaluating leading cloud-based solutions, the Blackfoot team chose Microsoft Dynamics 365 Finance & Operations because of its fit with the company's requirements, both now and in the future, as well as its flexibility, particularly for the work order/projects module.

To move as quickly as possible in implementing the new system, Blackfoot engaged Armanino LLP, one of the 25 largest independent accounting and consulting firms in the U.S. Armanino is a gold-certified Microsoft Dynamics partner, a member of the Microsoft Inner Circle and a 2020 winner of Microsoft's MSUS Partner Award – Business Applications – Modernize Finance and Operations.

"Armanino's implementation methodology resonated with us because we wanted to be involved and engaged every step of the way," says Bracey.

“The Armanino team also understood that it was important to us to meet as many of our requirements as possible using out-of-the-box functionality to avoid customizations. No matter what we needed the system to support, Armanino found a way to handle it.”

As part of the implementation engagement, Armanino also helped the Blackfoot team identify and replace inefficient business processes. “We didn’t want to automate bad processes,” says Honken. Bracey says that Armanino did a good job with “tough love.” She adds, “The Armanino team questioned our existing processes and continually shed light on best practices. It was great to have an agnostic partner looking at the big picture and helping us navigate those tough conversations.”

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**- Jessica Bracey,
Business Solutions
Strategist**

Results

Replacing multiple legacy systems with Dynamics 365 Finance & Operations created a solid foundation for Blackfoot’s cloud transformation. “Moving to the cloud enabled a culture change for everyone involved,” says Honken. “We no longer have to worry about upgrades or paying to get new features developed to support our needs. We can move in step with the needs of the company.”

The Blackfoot team credits Armanino leadership and expertise with a successful implementation and rollout during difficult and challenging times. “Our company was busier than ever during the pandemic while supporting a remote work force,” says Parker. “With Armanino, we never missed a beat.”

The new software streamlined invoicing, sales order tracking and inventory tracking, and reduced labor distribution by four days per month on average. The time savings from improved efficiency and automation in the new system helped Blackfoot save the equivalent of four full-time positions across the financial, information systems and engineering departments.

Real-time visibility is another benefit the company is seeing with their modern cloud software. “Our engineers now have visibility into inventory purchasing and invoice tracking so they can see where things are in the process,” says Bailey. “They have access to data they didn’t have before.” Honken adds that “access to information gets better every day and the financial close happens faster than before.”

Next Steps

Given the success of Dynamics 365 Finance & Operations at Blackfoot, the team is evaluating moving its on-premises customer relationship management (CRM) system to the cloud as well. “We will definitely look to partner with Armanino on our CRM effort and other transformation projects in the future,” says Bracey.

In the meantime, the project implementation team is enjoying seeing employees who use the system become empowered to answer their own questions and accomplish their jobs more effectively using the new software. “End users can search using Google for what they need and find out how to do it without our help,” says Honken. “It’s really changing everyone’s mindset about how they can work more efficiently.”

About Armanino^{LLP}

Armanino provides an integrated set of accounting services—audit, tax, consulting and technology solutions—to a wide range of organizations operating both in the US and globally. You can count on Armanino to think strategically, to provide the sound insights that lead to positive action. We address not just your compliance issues, but your underlying business challenges, as well—assessing opportunities, weighing risks, and exploring the practical implications of both your short- and long-term decisions.

When you work with us, we give you options that are fully aligned with your business strategy. At every stage in your company’s lifecycle, we’ll help you find the right balance of people, processes, and technology.

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- Lori Parker, Director of Accounting