Comprehensive Business Systems and Baring Industries; 27 Years of Success with Technology

"Comprehensive Business Systems works as our CIO and helps us make technology decisions based on a deep understanding of our business."

– Charles Sperry, President, Baring Industries

"Becoming engrained in a company's technology direction is more than just knowing the technology. It's about knowing the business."

This isn't your typical case study. You already know that we're going to tell you about a satisfied customer of Comprehensive Business Systems. You've already read a quote from their president about how CBS is helping them make business driven technology decisions. If they weren't a satisfied customer, why would they be a part of this story? To be sure, this case study is about business success and it is about technology. But to tell this story, we have to travel through time—past, present, and future. We're doing this because to understand how this relationship came to be, you have to understand where it has been, where it is, and where it's going.

Virtualization, disaster recovery, private cloud, mobility, IT security, Helpdesk…These are the kinds of projects Comprehensive Business Systems excels at. They know that IT is a specialty expertise and that even when organizations have in-house IT staff to lean on, companies like CBS help to keep them informed on what kinds of technology solutions are available in the marketplace to enhance their businesses. Becoming engrained in a company's technology direction is more than

just knowing the technology. It's about knowing the business. Winning a job is one thing, but building relationships is another. This is a story about two South Florida companies who have been integral to each other's success for over 27 years.

It would be easy to start in 1988 and work forward, but like we said, this isn't your typical case study and this story isn't just about an IT company. This is also a story about a South Florida business that made two fateful decisions in 1984 and 1988, decisions that would change the direction of their organization and turn a once small, on-premise laundry company into a $70 million-a-year business. Today, CBS helps this $70 million dollar business compute, connect, and collaborate in ways that were almost unimaginable in 1961. We're a long way from 1961, aren't we? So before we start talking about how CBS helps support Baring's IT infrastructure in South Florida and beyond, and before we get into the details about their role as their trusted outsourced CIO, we'll start their story at the beginning.

1961

Meet Baring Industries. Since 1961, Baring has been providing their clients with high quality construction services. When they started out, their focus was on-premise laundry services. The company's services and reputation for providing quality work grew throughout their first decade of business. A focus on high-quality people, a great work environment, efficient internal communication, client professionalism, and high-quality management resulted in a welcomed problem: Baring had outgrown their systems.

1972

By 1972, Baring's accounting system was overburdened. Their bookkeeper kept a manual journal entry and wrote out all of the accounting in books. There were no computers in the building to handle these tasks. The company leadership was unconvinced that technology would be worth the investment. Although Baring invested in third party audits of their books, there were no backups for their information. If their records were destroyed, they would most likely have been lost. Charles "Chuck" Sperry, current President of Baring, is hired in 1972.

1984

It took 10 years for Chuck Sperry to convince the ownership of Baring to buy their first computer, but the investment was worth it. The business was growing and the paper accounting was getting out of control. Other local businesses were starting to jump into the computer revolution, which promised efficiencies for accounting, database management, and word processing. The first spreadsheet software had been introduced in the late 70s and started changing the way businesses used computers. According to Sperry, the first computer at Baring consumed most of a room and a good chunk of the team's time because of the large learning curve. As the business expanded, they knew that they were going to need help with building out the technology to support their growth. Baring would soon be headed to the next stage of their technology journey.

In 1988, they were speaking with Ernst and Young to advise them on upgrading their system to a new network. EY consultants told Baring that they would need to re-enter all of their data since it couldn't be ported from their old CP/M platform. That same year, Stuart Hill, an Ernst & Young alumnus, founded Comprehensive Business Systems. CBS contacted Baring as part of a marketing campaign. Chuck invited them in for a meeting. CBS proposed to upgrade Baring's systems to Novell and convert their data. Furthermore, they provided an existing client as a reference to prove they could do so. In the end, Chuck decided to hire CBS to oversee the project. The data was converted successfully, saving Baring both time and lot of money.

1990

Most case studies focus on a single problem and its solution. However, this is a different type of case study. CBS worked with Baring to implement, convert and train them on Novell, but the story doesn't end there. Baring had just been purchased by a multi-national organization, which required them to upgrade their communications systems to enhance collaboration with their new colleagues from Italy to Cleveland.

"We used to have FedEx bills that would choke a horse," recalls Sperry. Baring needed to be able to share downloads of specs and drawings by their consultants between their various offices. Early internet connections were a disaster, but CBS worked to help them build a network that provided them with better speed and service in their office. At the time, CBS was supporting Baring's in-house staff by providing hardware and software support as well as suggestions to improve system utilization. "Our internal staff was sound, but gapped on some skills. CBS was brought in to help whenever that happened," said Sperry. Over the next 10 years, CBS helped with software and server upgrades, networking upgrades, email systems, and even technical support on Baring's website. As Baring grew, CBS's services helped provide support for 68 employees at five satellite offices in Dallas, Chicago, Nashville, Maryland, and New Jersey.

Private Cloud 2004

CBS setup a private cloud for Baring that they use for both Microsoft Office and their internal accounting system. Each employee is mapped to the company's shared data. Baring has even reduced the need for PC workstations for each user. Windows thin client terminals are now installed at far less expense. The private cloud also helps remote managers to securely access and download specs and drawings when they're on the road.

Security 2005

CBS worked with Baring to install firewalls at all offices. In fact, firewall technology extends across all systems. CBS has taken the private cloud concept and adapted the security at all locations. Users are connected to the main office via secure gateways and virtual private networks. This avoids the need to transfer files over the public internet. CBS also helps with a cloud-based anti-spam system, which blocks the spam that makes up approximately 75% of the total email that Baring receives.

Mobility 2008

From their first foray into Blackberry in the 2000s to tablets and mobile phones today, CBS has met Baring's technology needs when it comes to mobility. Baring employees can download drawings in the field and view them on their devices, rather than of carrying a roll of drawings to the customer site. Managers using Surface Pros and iPads can access email and collaborate from anywhere.

Virtualization 2010

15 years ago, Baring had four to five physical server boxes, each with a different purpose. Keeping up with their new server and licensing needs was overwhelming and they were frequently turning to CBS for assistance. "Every year or two, CBS was coming in and helping us buy, build, and install a new machine," said Sperry. CBS worked with Baring to go from five physical servers to two hosts running eight virtual servers. "Our server room used to be jam-packed with hardware and servers. Today, it looks like we're moving out." In addition to downsizing the physical space needed, the virtualization technologies put in place by CBS helped Baring reduce their new hardware purchases and electricity costs.
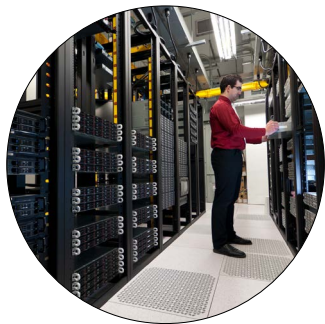
Managed Services 2011

Since 2011, CBS has completely managed IT services for Baring. The established relationship and CBS's expertise with mid-sized firms is the foundation of this engagement. CBS's proactive monitoring and reporting services allow them to address most IT issues before they cause significant problems. CBS takes care of the technology infrastructure and Baring focuses on their customers. These services help Baring improve performance, prevent downtime, and maximize the return on their investment in technology.

Disaster Recovery 2014

Not only is Baring now employing virtual server technology—something that would have been right out of a science fiction novel in 1961—they also have been working with CBS to have full-image backups of their virtual servers. The cost savings on the physical servers allowed them to install a disaster recovery backup system that can bring a server back to life in 12 minutes. Furthermore, CBS can help Baring virtually boot-up the backup from anywhere.

The Future

Their beginnings may have been as an on-site laundry service but today Baring distributes, manages, engineers and installs kitchen equipment for major hotel chains, universities, hospitals, and casinos. Fueled by a commitment to service excellence and supported by world class technology, the company has grown significantly. "Back in the 80s, we were a $3 to $4 million dollar company," said Sperry, "Last year, we achieved an excess of $70 million." As Baring has grown through time, CBS has been there to support them. CBS has played a central role over the last decade in every major technological advancement at the organization.

The relationship that CBS and Baring have built over the last 27 years is one of trust and understanding. Sperry remarked of the relationship, "CBS has been with us every step of the way to get new people in and working on our systems. This is one of the main advantages we have had working with CBS. They have gotten to know the business, the company, and the people. When a company doesn't understand your business, you have to work hard to bring them up to speed."

CBS has been committed to becoming a strategic partner. "They are proactive. They bring new services to Baring and make recommendations when they see any new technologies that might help us be more efficient and economical in conducting our business," said Sperry. CBS's Marc Schauben says that Sperry has made it easy for CBS, "It's a pleasure to work with Charles. He has made it easy because he's so open to new technology. There's a lot of credibility and trust you build after a 27-year relationship. Baring knows us and knows that when we make suggestions that they're credible and that we have their best interests in mind." CBS continues to look into technologies that will help Baring move their business into the future. Whether it be digital fiber connections, fast and reliable wireless point-to-point connections, or whatever emerging technology is going to help them operate more quickly and efficiently, CBS will be there to make the business case when the technology makes business sense.

"It's about the relationship," says Schauben. "There are a lot of businesses that don't understand that. They're looking for the big sale on day one. I want to save Baring money. I'm thinking about being with them 20 years from now. Helping make recommendations that are going to drive Baring's bottom line is a big part of our long-term partnership."

Learn how CBS helps companies in South Florida achieve success through technology. Download our eBook, **10 Money Saving Secrets Your IT Person Won't Tell You.**

CBS Comprehensive Business Systems