



Outcomes



Lewistown is a borough located on the Juniata River, 61 miles northwest of Harrisburg in Mifflin County, Pennsylvania. The population of the region is estimated at 35,000 with the local Utility Department managing about 11,000 accounts.

Three different vendors tried and failed to meet the department's unique billing requirements before CMI had the opportunity to demonstrate the capability of its utility software suite. Immediately, the Lewistown Utility Department staff could see that CMI had the system that would finally provide them with the billing solution they needed. Since the successful installation of CMI in 2003, the department has been using CMI's Finance, Payroll and Utility Billing software modules. Here's what Deanna Hassinger, Office Manager, and her team had to say about the success of their CMI applications in their department:

CMI to the Rescue for the Lewistown, Pennsylvania Utility Department

Can you briefly describe your department's unique billing requirements?

Our rate structure is fairly complex. In addition, we have a number of multiple meter accounts that need to be reconciled into one monthly statement. We couldn't get any other software provider to work with us and coordinate their application to get the billing done correctly. None could merge all of the information together to even calculate a bill. Before CMI, we just had to prepare all of these types of bills manually. Needless to say, it was a very time consuming task. CMI to the rescue ... no more manual billing!

The conversion process was so easy – with CMI our data was installed and we were literally running the next day.

How is CMI's Utility Billing superior to your three previous suppliers, and how does it make your department more efficient?

Simply stated, it calculates all of our billing, including those with multiple meters. We have eliminated manual billings and have been able to add some additional features. Today, 100% of our account billing is processed with CMI software.

How does your application make use of the user-defined report writer that is integrated into the CMI software systems you are using within the department?

We use the user-defined report writer pretty much every day. We generate a lot of reports now with much more efficiency than in the past. Before, all reports were very labor intensive with all manual calculations. Now, all of our procedures are much more user – friendly. Because we can extract the data we want, our monthly reports in all of our CMI applications, Utility, Finance and Payroll run without a problem.

CMI is in Ohio and about eight hours away. Was this ever perceived as a problem?

Never. We have always had the ability to dial in to their help desk. We have never had an issue that they were not able to provide us with a solution over the phone. Since we installed the software, it has performed so well that we have never had a situation where someone has had to come in to fix it. We are calling their help desk now about once a month. Since we are using the system to its fullest, we really understand it inside and out. Most all of our calls today are handled with a quick fix.

What has been your experience with CMI training?

Excellent. A CMI training tech came to our site and spent a good week with us. The conversion process was so easy! When we went through a conversion with a previous vendor, we were running parallel for a month – with CMI our data was installed and we were literally running the next day.

What has been your experience with CMI's ongoing support?

Very, very good – response is quick and turnaround on the projects we have given them has been very reasonable. We have given them some real challenges and they have always risen to the occasion. They have been really good in letting us know the time frame for the project. Some they will say will take a little time, while others they get done within the same day. We have given them some more difficult problems simply because we use the system.

Can you give an example of a challenge you called on CMI for their help?

Yes, we wanted to be able to manage service calls with Utility Billing so CMI reviewed our application and set up a service call for us. Now, we are actually generating a service call request right from the system, where before we were writing them by hand. Today, when the customer calls in with a service requirement, we can quickly review their service history using CMI. Before, we would have had to go to the archives and search through mounds of paper to find the info on the account. Now, we can get the information on that account while they are on the phone.

Did you have any hesitation before signing the contract with CMI?

The system had to be able to handle our billing. After three failed attempts by other suppliers we had to be sure we were making the right selection. CMI was able to demonstrate the capabilities of the system before we signed so we were confident in our choice.

Since your department acquires hardware from a vendor other than CMI, how has CMI's hardware team helped coordinate any upgrades?

We recently installed a new server and CMI was very helpful in the transition. We were nervous about the switch, but thanks to CMI and our hardware vendor working together, the startup was almost seamless. Together they got it up and running with virtually no downtime.

CMI's Utility Billing System is a powerful and flexible application with the capability to bill for water, sewer, refuse, deregulated electric, gas and capital charges. The system permits complete owner/tenant tracking because of a flexible account number structure.

Key features include:

- Integration to automated meter reading equipment
- Billing for multiple utility services
- Barcode/OCR receipting for speed and accuracy
- Integration to CMI Financial Management
- Built-in user-defined report writer
- Microsoft Office integration for reports
- Internet inquiry and payments

What would you say are the most impressive results with each of the CMI software modules your department is running?

For Utility, hands down it is the ability to handle our billing and the user defined reporting. For Finance, we have eliminated hand written ledgers. The system is much more efficient today – all of our procedures are so much more user friendly. No more manual calculations! As for Payroll, it was very labor intensive before. And now, we have all prior year information on the system which really saves time when there is a need to look back at old records.

Some local governments might hesitate on computer projects because they fear the hassle of the changes that it would bring. What would you say to them?

Our move to CMI has never caused us any problems. It has eased our workload and has made our department so much more efficient. We used to maintain large ledgers that we packed away once CMI's Utility software was in place. We back up all of our data, so we don't need a storage room anymore. All of the information I need for the department is at my fingertips. The reports make it really easy to access the data. We've eliminated a lot of paper and are now trying to convert at least one process a year to paperless. So, I would tell other departments – go for it!

If another municipality were to ask you about CMI, what would you say?

We have always highly recommended CMI for all of the software we are running. We've done it in the past and would do it again!

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