



AlarmBiller

Iconipro

When owner Joe Hay founded IconiPro in 1991, the company focused on fire suppression. Over the last 24 years, the Pacific City, Ore.-based company has evolved into a security and home automation provider and has expanded the market it serves. For most of its existence, IconiPro's steady growth was easy to manage and maintain, with Hay and his wife handling the business side of the company themselves.

One of the main reasons for IconiPro's success, Hay says, is his refusal to view each installation as a cash cow and attempt to squeeze the most profit out of a customer. Rather, he's built the company on a service-based philosophy. So rather than push a particular solution or equipment from a single manufacturer, he emphasizes the importance of finding the best solution, whatever that may entail: "We're not driven by money. Yes, we want to make a profit, but we also want to build a relationship with our customers. Some companies focus on a single vendor, but we work with three providers," he says. "No one brand is a panacea, but if you try to force a product or solution on a customer, it creates frustration."

Hay also takes a non-traditional approach to hiring, looking for individuals who have the best skills for a position, regardless of whether they have experience in security. A prime example is Operations Manager Glenn Gillas, who Hay hired fresh out of college in 2014. "Glenn had no experience in the alarm industry, but he had a business administration degree and the intelligence level for

the job,” Hay says. “If someone hasn’t been in the industry, they don’t have a lot of preconceptions, so they’re going to ask questions and make sounder decisions. If you hire intelligent, skilled people with good business sense, they can help you grow your bottom line. You can teach them the specifics of the alarm industry.”

Given the billing and tracking challenges associated with maintaining paper-based records, Hay made the decision to transition IconiPro into a virtual company, which could be run from anywhere. Accomplishing this goal while also accommodating future growth would require a billing/business management software solution, so Hay gave his new Operations Manager a trial by fire of sorts. After only a few weeks on the job, Gillas’s first major task was to research billing and business management software designed specifically for security companies and identify the best fit for IconiPro.

Based on that research, IconiPro evaluated two potential solutions: a leading enterprise software that would be deployed on-site, and AlarmBiller, a web-based management software solution designed to streamline invoicing, payment processing and work order management for security dealers of any size. The enterprise solution would require a significant investment in addition to monthly fees, and an additional charge to provide mobile access to technicians in the field. In contrast to the enterprise software option, AlarmBiller made better financial sense. “Between the software itself, the modules, yearly upgrades and the hardware to support it, we calculated that it would take three to five years just to break even with the enterprise solution,” Hay said. “On the other hand, there was no up-front investment for AlarmBiller, only a monthly subscription fee, which made perfect sense for us.”

In addition to cost-effectiveness, Hay says AlarmBiller not only offered robust functionality but was also miles ahead of the enterprise solution in terms of user-friendliness. “The software is much more simplified and intuitive and much easier to use. Combined with its affordability, it was a no-brainer for us to go with AlarmBiller,” Hay says.

Given Hay’s philosophy of providing his customers with solutions that meet their specific needs rather than cookie-cutter systems built on a single provider’s products, the flexibility of AlarmBiller to accommodate growth as well as additional features and functionality as needed struck a chord. “We need software that’s going to be as responsive as we are. We live in a fluid world and we have a responsibility to our customers, so a rigid, fixed solution wasn’t going to work,” he says. “I’ve seen companies make the decision to go with a particular billing and management solution and then scrap it within a year because it wasn’t what they thought it would be. Being from Missouri, my philosophy is ‘Show Me’ – so I’m only interested in results, not what someone says they can do.”

In the alarm industry, growth is a very good thing. However, that growth can pose challenges, especially when an acquisition is involved. After growing steadily for more than 20 years, IconiPro made an acquisition in mid-2014, purchasing Power Alarm, a similarly-sized and similarly-operated company. Upon completion, which occurred much more quickly than originally planned, the

acquisition doubled IconiPro’s customer base and recurring revenue almost overnight. For any paper-based company, manually combining accounts from an acquisition with existing accounts is incredibly time- and labor-intensive. Thankfully, IconiPro’s acquisition came shortly after the company deployed AlarmBiller, which streamlined the process considerably. “By the time we acquired Power Alarm, we had had a chance to get immersed in AlarmBiller and learn about its capabilities, which made migrating their customer base into the software go very smoothly,” Hay says.

Since implementing AlarmBiller, IconiPro has moved closer to Hay’s goal of creating a paperless operation, significantly reducing the number of physical records down to three or four sheets of paper. While the company isn’t quite paperless yet, that has nothing to do with AlarmBiller, according to Hay. “The ultimate goal is still to be 100 percent paperless, I just can’t let go. I’m a dinosaur; I always keep a pad of paper handy to write things down and then transcribe my notes,” he says.

Rather than relying on paper files as it had in the past, IconiPro now uses iPads for creating and accessing all “paperwork,” which is stored in the cloud-based AlarmBiller solution. Technicians and other employees are now able to view every document related to a customer at any time from anywhere they have an internet connection. “Our guys have a virtual office in their van. They can complete a work order and upload it before leaving a job site, and we can bill the customer right away,” Hay says. “A paper folder can get lost or documents that are supposed to be there can go missing. In that case, there’s no sense having the file in the first place. That doesn’t happen with AlarmBiller.”

AlarmBiller has also increased the productivity of IconiPro’s technicians, who no longer have to return to the office to retrieve a file folder for unscheduled service that may come up during the course of the day. “If one of our techs gets a service call while he’s out in the field, he can pull up the file and immediately have a full understanding of the customer and their system before they get to the site,” Hay says. “AlarmBiller is an integral part of our business. It’s made us much more efficient and a lot greener.”

As a result of this improved efficiency, Hay says AlarmBiller has directly contributed to IconiPro’s bottom line. “AlarmBiller has really helped us manage our cash flow and make sure our payables are fairly current. We’ve also reduced our slow-pay base, which is another big benefit,” he says.

In today’s connected world, customers just expect the ability to receive bills via email and pay them online. Under its old system, these in-demand services were either extremely labor-intensive or next to impossible for IconiPro to offer. As Hay explains, “Prior to AlarmBiller, we were using conventional software. We could email bills but it was much more cumbersome to send out 500 to 600 bills a month. Being able to offer the convenience of online payment and auto payment has been a big hit with our customers. There was no way we could have done that in the past.”

Being in the technology business, Hay says it’s important that IconiPro’s technicians be able to

present demos, draw up work orders, have customers sign documents and email copies of relevant “paperwork” to them. “The combination of iPads and AlarmBiller really raises the professionalism of IconiPro as a company, which helps customers to not be as hesitant,” he says.

“As an owner, I absolutely need to know reality. For example, if one of our guys has scheduled work and says he’ll do it today but in reality, it takes two more days, I need to know that,” Hay explains. “I can track time when someone is supposed to be on a job site and how long the job takes. I’m not being Big Brother, but it’s a good way to check up and ensure my employees’ mental well-being. Maybe someone is going through something in their life and needs to take a step back. That’s important”

“As a company, you’re only as good as the face that’s in front of the customer, so if you don’t invest in your employees, you’re shooting yourself in the foot,” he says.

Hay has been impressed with the responsiveness of AlarmBiller to questions and requests he and his employees have had since implementing the solution. “Since we started with AlarmBiller, we’ve found certain things that we felt would help us as a company get even more out of the software,” he says. “They’ve been very responsive with making some changes based on our input. That’s a big deal for us.”

Like many alarm company owners, after 24 years in the business, Hay, who also operates a charter boat business in the summer, has begun to think about his exit strategy. “I have a three-year expansion plan to invest in the company. Are our profits as high as they could be? Probably not, but the return will be higher at the end,” Hay says. “At the end of three years, do I sell the company? Will my employees buy the company? Who knows? What I do know is that IconiPro is a financially solid company that’s marketable. AlarmBiller has played a big role in getting us to that point. It’s a great tool that enables us to be more efficient and provide great service for our customers. It really helps us be a better company.”

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