



Featured Client:

## Western Water Works

At first glance, Western Water Works, a California-based distributor of pipe valves and fittings for potable water, which includes drinking, waste, sewer, and storm water, is a typical wholesale distributor. Family-owned-and-operated since 1945, Western Water Works has successfully preserved the quintessential Ma-and-Pa culture that many distributors are fighting to maintain. However, Western's familial roots run far deeper than the fact that its current president is third generation owner Bruce Himes. Sure, the business has remained in the family, but more importantly, the business and its employees have become a part of the family.

About a decade ago, Western, California's original waterworks distributor, resolved to add unparalleled growth to its list of accolades. The goal: Create a technology infrastructure that would allow growth in a painless manner. A \$5 million company at the time, Western was comfortably afloat with 22 employees, but as any thriving company knows, Western recognized the growth a properly executed plan would stimulate. Promoting a culture based on respect, discipline, and integrity, Western was conscious of the potential their working environment fostered. As the mid to late nineties marked the beginning of a new era, one of technology and network-based communicating, Western quickly realized the added value a well-implemented software solution would provide. Himes views technology as an enabler, saying, "Technology doesn't cause growth. It allows us to grow." Combining their tradition of hard work with technology as the stimulus, Western set out to grow its family a little more, and with the support of Distributor's EDGE and the implementation of SX.enterprise, Western's size and profitability increased.

### Western Water Works Aligns with DE

At the time, Western did currently have an ERP software package, but its costs far outweighed its benefits. Unfortunately, that system was Western's third initially

impressive but ultimately disappointing solution. After several failed relationships, Western was searching for a partner who would stimulate their growth by providing implementation services and extended team and plan support. At this point, Western had discovered that their purchasing decision should be less about the product itself and more about the support the software provider offered.

In 2000, Western met, and almost immediately, welcomed Acumen Group, a founding partner of Distributor's EDGE, into their now sure to grow family. Western's team remembers this decision to be quite simple. Acumen's Craig Killam presented a demo, and simultaneously Western recognized their own philosophy—a true commitment to their customers-- in Acumen.

When Acumen joined Western, Western was an \$8.8 million company. Now a \$50 million company, Western is certain they made the right decision. Immediately, Himes knew he chose well, saying, "Even before we went live, we saw the benefits of partnering with Acumen and implementing SX.enterprise. Talk is cheap, but from the beginning, Acumen has always delivered whatever they have committed to." After implementation, Western continued to see the benefits of their new partnership. Acumen eliminated the need for an IT team, customer service increased, wasting paper was obsolete, and the culture improved even more.

### IT Partner

Western has grown exponentially over the last decade. When they first began growing, they were too small to staff an IT team, and more importantly, they were not interested in doing so. Even as they grew, their partnership with Acumen allowed them to continue without a staffed IT Team. Himes says, "Because of Acumen, we don't have an IT department. We haven't had to because they help us with technology-focused issues, like our website, networking our computers, our printers,



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and so on.” When Western first partnered with Acumen, their goal was to implement a sturdy technology-based infrastructure, so Acumen installed all new hardware, including multiple servers, new desktops, and even laptops, which at the time were still a very new idea. Before Acumen, Western did not have e-mail, and their internal communication was still largely Post-It-Note-based. The actual sticky pads, not the desktop version.

While Western did grow in size, they are still not one of the largest in their industry. However, their technology and the new abilities they have due to their system allow them to appear larger than they actually are. Even as a midsize company, Western operates as a large one, and they successfully deliver as such. As a technology-based solution provider, Acumen revolutionized Western’s business practices.

### Customer Service Levels Improve

Increased technology improved more than just memo circulation; Western’s customer service increased dramatically as well, even with the significant decrease in the ratio of employees to production. At \$50 million, Western employs 50 people, whereas, at \$5 million, there were 22 employees. Noting the streamline effect that SX.e and Acumen had on Western, Western’s team is impressed by how few people are needed to make the company run so smoothly, noting this as one key reason to implement technology. Another reason: Getting more out of fewer people. According to Western’s hiring team, it is difficult to find people who meet the demanding requirements for working at Western. He seeks dedicated, hardworking individuals, and he was looking for a way to get more out of his current employees rather than searching for comparable talent.

With the advent of mobile devices and laptops, sales managers are reachable 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and as the devoted service providers they are, they welcome late night calls from customers when a pipe is needed first thing in the morning. Western sells to the customer only what the customer needs, and SX.e helps them determine what that is exactly. SX.e has allowed Western to continuously maintain the appropriate inventory levels and track key performance metrics, including average lead-time and ship time. Therefore, Western can fulfill its promises to the customer.

### Company Culture Strengthens

Often times, smaller family-owned distribution companies like the ‘95 Western Water Works resist a move to a

software product like SX.e because they fear losing the culture of a small family-owned business. However, Western has noticed the exact opposite effect. The Western crew believes that culture comes before IT, but in this case, he knows their culture has been strengthened by great IT, believing Western’s relationship with Acumen has only improved Western’s culture. Mostly, the culture has improved because SX.e has bettered business, and Western’s employees are proud to be a part of that growth. Western’s family of employees are more confident because SX.e and other Acumen implemented technology has enabled them to surpass expectations and impress customers. For example, they are now able to place orders from the job site. Western’s employees have more flexibility with their increased mobility, and often times, drivers will just drop in to visit a customer and say hello. Since implementing Paperless Office in 2004, Western was able to pool their many sales and accounting offices, each located at one of their four warehouses, so there is only one sales and accounting office. Paperless Office has decreased paper waste, and it has furthered customer service because all records are easily reachable.

### Western Water Works and Acumen Group

About a decade ago, Western set out to implement a technology-based system that would foster growth. Now a \$50 million company, Western has achieved their goal, and they plan to continue to grow. When asked where credit is due, Himes quickly transcends the line from president to proud papa, praising his entire team, including his extended team at Acumen. He credits his staff’s dedication and knows his team is doing something better than his competitors, but he is quick to mention Acumen’s dedication and SX.e’s usability. Himes says, “Acumen comes onsite often to help us along,” and of one Acumen employee specifically, he says, “He is one of the best people we have ever dealt with in anything. Lucky for us, he just happens to be in IT.” Western appreciates the high level of commitment Acumen offers, and he comfortably places a great level of trust in Acumen. He describes his relationship with Acumen as “very strong.” Again, he refers to technology as a mere enabler, but he says it would be hard to have the combination of Acumen and SX.e on your side and not grow.



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