

Custom Home

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Roger Blattberg and Stacey L. Hoffman

Changing the management systems of a successful company is a bit like rebuilding a race-car engine—during the race. Even successful custom builders, therefore, sometimes fail to take necessary steps to upgrade their systems. Not Roger Blattberg and Stacey Hoffman. Running the company that Blattberg founded 28 years ago, they completely revamped their project management and cost account-

ing procedures, improving efficiency, boosting profits, and positioning the company for growth in a changing market. And all this without missing a beat in their ongoing projects. ■ Like many custom builders, Blattberg had grown his company in modular fashion, by adding project superintendents, each of whom ran his jobs much as an independent builder would. But with projects increasing in both number and scope—the company is currently finishing a 15,000-square-foot residence—the limits to that approach eventually became clear. “It was at a point where Roger was looking to take the company further,” says Hoffman, who joined the company in 2003 after working in commercial construction. That called for commercial-grade sys-

Great Falls Construction
Great Falls, Va.
Type of business: custom builder
Years in business: 28
Employees: 22
2006 volume: \$8.5 million
2006 starts: 7

tems, she says. “Some of these buildings are no different from small office buildings in terms of cost, but in details and finishes, they’re much more complex.” ■ To better manage that complexity, Blattberg and Hoffman shifted responsibility for estimating and scheduling to a new corps of project managers, freeing their superintendents to focus on the day-to-day construc-

tion process. Hand-in-hand with this change, the company shifted its internal cost accounting from a completed-contract basis to percentage-of-completion reporting. Now, Hoffman says, “We can better identify every cost involved, put a budget on it and track it as it goes out.” The result is a clearer view of where the dollars—and the hours—are going. “When we schedule a job, are we allowing enough time to finish the job? You can see that from how you’ve posted labor costs.” ■ Hoffman says the new systems will allow the company to take on more and bigger projects, strengthen its standing among architects and upscale professionals—“a clientele that can understand that kind of structured approach and appreciate it”—and thrive even in a down market. “When market conditions change,” she says, “that’s when the strong survive.” —B.D.S.