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Remington Group moves up helping companies move on

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SPECIAL TO THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

Paper goods manufacturer SCA North America is moving its 150 employees from Eddystone to the new Cira Centre office tower. It's a massive undertaking, even beyond the bricks-and-mortar aspect.

Phones and furniture, computer networks and paper files — everything's got to go.

As vice president of human resources, John F. O'Rourke is supposed to oversee the move. Human resources? Well, it's the closest thing SCA has to a property manager.

"It's not really in anybody's job description," O'Rourke said.

Rather than go it alone, this HR manager has brought in an outside consultant to manage the move. Founded in 1992, the Wayne-based Remington Group oversees construction projects, manages architects and engineers and choreographs corporate relocations.

"Businesses typically don't do this every day," said Remington's president and owner William F. Connor. "They are involved in running their business, and building a new facility is not part of their core competency."

Is corporate real estate truly so complicated? Connor says it is.

"They have to go out and hire designers, hire contractors, decide what kind of chairs people will sit in and where the data center goes. There are literally thousands of decisions that have to be made during that process," he said.

Remington Group employs eight people and, while Connor won't disclose revenues,

he said his services typically add less than 1 percent to the overall cost of a client's project.

That expense is more than justified in the eyes of Brian Sindors.

As scout executive for the Chester County Council, Boy Scouts of America, he engaged Remington Group to assist with a \$6.5 million, multiyear project of improvements at the organization's 900 acres of camping facilities.

UP CLOSE

COMPANY: Remington Group Inc.

LOCATION: Wayne

YEAR FOUNDED: 1992

PRESIDENT: William F. Connor

TYPE OF COMPANY:

Project managers handling building construction, finance, engineering, architecture, general contracting, real estate and relocation management

RECENT CLIENTS: SCA North

America, Guideworks, Chester

County Council Boy Scouts of

America, GSI Commerce

"What we have paid them has been far outweighed by the value to the organization. It has truly been a value-added situation," he said.

The Boy Scouts project offers a good example of the skills Remington Group brings to the table. Did we mention that the camping facilities in question straddle both Pennsylvania and Maryland, encompassing three counties and five townships? It's got the makings of a true bureaucratic nightmare.

"Remington went to all the meetings of townships and counties regarding all the appropriate permits and approvals, making sure all the appropriate inspections were completed. They handled all of that for us," Sindors said.

Others would make the same claim. Moving companies will offer to manage moves. Real estate brokers will offer to locate and coordinate various service providers. The atmosphere is far more competitive than that which Connor encountered when he first set up shop.

"Fifteen years ago, no one knew what project management was," he said. "In today's world, everybody knows what project management is, but everybody calls themselves a project manager. You can go to a moving company; they will tell you they do project management. Maybe they do, but only on a small part of what the project is."

In that kind of environment, marketing means education.

"We have to talk to clients about all the things involved in a project, to help them understand the dozens and dozens of details that have to be handled," Connor said. "At the beginning of the process, most companies don't even know what they don't know."

One thing they may not know has to do with the issue of independence. While other project managers may have business relationships with vendors, or at least a preferred list of partners, Remington Group professes complete neutrality.

"We really work to make sure we are an independent voice for our business owners as they work on their projects," Connor said.

REMINGTON: Paying attention to details

That independence acts as an inducement to potential clients who may see Remington's vendor neutrality as a means toward getting the right services at the right price.

That price varies widely. Connor may charge by the hour or he may offer a lump-sum fee depending on the nature of the project. What he won't do is get paid as a percentage of the overall project cost, which he says could potentially put his own interests out of alignment with the interests of the client.

What does he do to earn the money? You name it. Remington Group will budget a project, manage the costs as the work progresses, oversee construction — all the nuts and bolts that go into making sure a corporate move or a new construction project goes off smoothly.

"Our job is really to anticipate

bottlenecks before they occur," Connor said. "If we are building an office building, we may be digging footings in the ground today, but the thing we are worried about is what will be happening six months from now when we are hanging drywall in the office space. Is the millwork already on order? Will it be the right type? This might need to be addressed today so that it isn't a problem six months from now."

In most cases, this includes a high degree of hands-on work. In the Boy Scouts project, for instance, "they were on site at least weekly to conduct progress meetings and make sure the contractors were delivering what was in the specs," Sindors said.

Most recently, Remington Group has begun to develop an expertise in computer networks. It's something customers are increasingly concerned about, SCA's O'Rourke said.

"If something is going to go wrong with your move, it is going to be around IT and communications," he said. While the in-house IT team may want to take up the challenge, he said, those tech professionals may not have the particular expertise needed to transport their systems. "That was a major consideration. You can't shut down your IT systems or your phone systems. That kind of business continuity is critical."

As Connor looks to the future, he predicts this area of IT consulting will become a significant avenue of growth.

"The data area is a major portion of all of the companies that we deal with these days," he said. "They need technology solutions that work effectively. We want to make sure that they are getting the best value and to make sure that it gets done properly."

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