

# Huffman Builders

## Plano, Texas



## SMB Collaborator Paves the Way to Growth and Accountability

SMB Case Study Series

### Company Overview

Huffman, founded in 1978, designs, builds, and sells offices, medical facilities, and office condominiums. The Huffman brand is synonymous with proven processes and methodologies that enable the construction of medical and office condominium complexes that merge form to function. Attention to detail can be seen in every aspect of a Huffman project from design to finish.

Based in Plano, Texas, Huffman has achieved steady growth through its corporate and franchise programs. The company has franchisees in Houston, San Antonio, Denton County, South Lake Texas, Ocala and Miami Florida, and Orange County, California. Huffman anticipates adding six additional franchisees in the near future with more to come. Revenue of approximately \$110 million is projected for 2008.

### The Challenge

While Huffman has been in the construction business for over 30 years, the past four years have formalized and delivered the predictable condo office construction and supporting business methodologies and processes. At the same time, Huffman implemented a franchise business model. Together, the processes and franchise program have driven fast growth and the need to create standardized approaches to business.

Key to franchise productivity is the ability to manage new opportunity from signature to revenue in a very short timeframe. To do this, Huffman created standardized and packaged business information, tools for project management (such as Microsoft Project), project estimation and bid creation, financials, and reporting.

Additionally, the Huffman back office capability and infrastructure needed to scale...quickly! The challenge was devising the best way to improve the services to a growing base of franchisees while not increasing Huffman's financial burden. Everyone in the company realized that was a tall order.

"Previously Huffman added IT engineering resources to make sure applications were kept current and access was as consistent and secure as possible, but it was an expensive approach," said Dusty Ansley, Vice President of Operations at Huffman. Faced with escalating staffing costs, Ansley found himself jumping into the IT breach to solve staff shortages and manage cost. Ansley spent up to 20% of his time designing and overseeing the implementation of IT infrastructures. As an exec, he realized the need to refocus his time and energy on growing the company, not keeping IT up and running. But how?

"As we looked at next steps for our IT infrastructure we realized the importance of these decisions, we would either be enabling or inhibiting growth," Ansley stated. Putting the right solution in place would accelerate growth and shore up the high level of access and security required by employees and franchisees. The company wrestled with how much investment should be made in infrastructure, additional staff, and new applications, which were all competing with each other. "The challenge was keeping the IT resources we had up and running at all times. Reliability quickly became an issue for us as we grew," Ansley added.

### Requirements and Selection Process

Huffman considered investing in more internal resources - additional servers and staff - but quickly rejected the idea due to the high cost. The company looked at a distributed computing model, possibly stepping away from their centralized resources. This approach would require the repurchase of software licenses, which was conservatively estimated at \$60,000 and would require ongoing, recurring annual license costs. This option was also rejected due to cost.

Huffman evaluated a third alternative. Outsource the entire IT operation to a third party to host all of their applications, provide full systems management, and ensure the proper access and security levels. After much debate, Huffman chose to execute the outsourced model as it represented the least cost, greatest performance, and scalability of all the options. "Once we made the decision to outsource, NextCorp was the only logical choice for us since they had the depth of experience we required," Ansley stated.

Huffman implemented the SMB Collaborator, from NextCorp. Based on Microsoft Office, Exchange, and SharePoint, the SMB Collaborator SaaS (Software as a Service) solution delivers high-performance and secure email, web collaboration, and productivity tools all via the Web. This approach

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allows Huffman employees and franchisees to improve communication, exchange information, and collaborate in real-time – safely, securely, and without disruption. “I was impressed with NextCorp and the SMB Collaborator. We were able to go from discovery meetings and needs analysis to implementation within two weeks. They delivered exactly what they said they would and on time,” Ansley stated.

### Realized Benefits

“The advantage of the SMB Collaborator solution is the ease of allowing new franchisees access to Huffman resources. With only a few clicks of the mouse, we are now able to get our new business partners up and running within minutes of final signature. With the SMB Collaborator we have seen significant improvements in our ability to provide access to any electronic information from any source via implementation of NextCorp’s recommendation.

Huffman users and franchisees now have access to any application or resource from anywhere. This improved access to critical information from remote offices and/or job sites has proven to be a growth enabler. With real-time decision making now possible on job sites, productivity has increased substantially. By choosing NextCorp, we were able to save \$60,000.00 and reduce our monthly IT costs by \$6500 a month. That is a first year savings of \$138,000, not to mention the productivity gains. A win win to say the least,” Ansley stated.

With the outsourced model and the assistance of NextCorp’s SMB Collaborator, Dusty Ansley has returned his focus to the company operations. The SMB Collaborator, along with Huffman’s existing CRM and accounting solutions, allows Dusty and the other members of the leadership team to review monthly financial statements, revenue projections, P & L’s, and balance sheets for each franchisee, giving them the predictability needed to run a successful business. Huffman also uses the CRM solution as a MLS system, allowing them to track the progress of all construction.

Huffman is now able to manage their data, which is one of their most important assets. “We no longer worry about the security of our data, since it is centrally handled by NextCorp. Potential disasters, such as fire, flood, and tornados, are no longer threats that could potentially have wiped us out,” indicated Ansley. Huffman has shifted all the management of IT resources and applications to NextCorp. As a result, Huffman substantially lowered the number of internal staff and resource costs while driving a new level of business continuity.

SMB Collaborator has enabled Huffman to:

- Audit franchisees, on the fly, from their office in Plano instead of from field offices and manually access local financial information – a significant savings in time and money;
- Lend real-time support to the bid process, improving bids and maximizing revenue;
- Offer improved training resources and increase productivity more quickly;
- Deliver improved security across all business information resources;
- Stay current on the latest and most improved version of Microsoft products such as, Office 2007; and,
- Create a competitive advantage by getting franchisees up and running in as little as 3 – 5 minutes.

With SMB Collaborator, Huffman looks to substantially increase their users by over 1000%, without adding overhead.

“SMB Collaborator makes us more nimble and gives us the ability to change faster than our competitors. Franchisees grasp this market advantage readily. They see that tools like Microsoft Project, and access to the Huffman processes and methodologies, can catapult a four man shop from being lost in the crowd to standing out in their local market. SMB Collaborator is an added benefit Huffman sells to our franchisees. We highly recommend NextCorp and SMB Collaborator.” Dusty Ansley, Vice President of Operations.

### About the SMB Collaborator

The SMB Collaborator is a subscription-based organizational and personal productivity tool offered by NextCorp. Built on proven and widely accepted Microsoft solutions, the SMB Collaborator brings industrial-strength productivity and collaboration benefits to the small and medium business. Available in 12, 24, or 36 month subscriptions, businesses are assured of having the best tools, common practices, training, and support for their small and medium business - all without any of the traditional upfront capital outlay or investment.

Join the collaboration and productivity revolution, today! Learn more about the SMB Collaborator by visiting: [www.getsmb.com](http://www.getsmb.com) or calling 888-525-6398.

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