

Tri-B Nursery

The Berry Family of Nurseries is one of the largest privately owned wholesale nurseries in the country, with \$150 million in annual sales and 6,500 acres in active production. Berry's four divisions span from the East Coast to the Midwest, and employ over 1500 workers.

Headquartered in Oklahoma, the Berry Family's Tri-B division spans 450 acres planted with perennials, trees and shrubs, which the company sells primarily to national and regional big box retail outlets.

Labor Relations

As chief financial officer of Tri-B, Dave Watt is charged with controlling the company's bottom line, including labor costs. Tri-B was using a manual punch system to track employee time and attendance. However, the nature of nursery work left Tri-B and other Berry Family divisions vulnerable to a variety of abuses and inaccuracies.

On any given day, Tri-B's 400-plus employees may work in multiple areas across the nursery, starting their shift in one location and finishing in another. Many employees are seasonal workers, who frequently travel to different states to find the best work and then return to Tri-B—sometimes several times a year.

Watt also discovered that many employees were engaged in "buddy punching," a practice where one employee punches the time card of another employee, and sometimes several employees.

Some workers were doing this out of convenience, because punching the clock involved traveling back to the original time clock location.

Other employees were doing "favors" for their coworkers, punching them in and out when they might not even be on site—or in the state for that matter. Even those employees who were doing their best to

follow company policies by traveling back to punch out at the original location were costing Tri-B in unnecessary time.

"Because of the way many of our employees work, tracking even the most basic information—who's on site and who isn't—can be very difficult," said Watt.

Watt began to look for another time and attendance system that would help address the company's unique challenges, and allow him to take control of labor costs once and for all. He examined several solutions and selected Qquest Software Systems' TimeForce because it was affordable, easy to install and would give him the control he needed.

Installation: A "Dirty" Job

As with most installation processes, the first step was determining rules and then configuring the TimeForce software to address Tri-B's specific needs. One requirement was that employees be able to log in and out at any clock, regardless of where they were. Qquest's electronic, centralized system easily resolved this issue.

Qquest also linked the new software to Tri-B's internal payroll system. Before switching to TimeForce, payroll personnel had to manually enter information from each punch card into the system. TimeForce completely automated this process, cutting down significantly the time it takes Tri-B to prepare payroll.

But although TimeForce offers a lot of flexibility and can be customized to meet just about every customer request, most of what Tri-B really needed was hardware customizations.

Because most of the company's time clocks are located outdoors, they have to be extremely durable, and flexible at the same time. The electronic components, wiring and input devices need to be sturdy enough to withstand dust, sun, rain and other natural elements, as well as potential employee tampering.

In addition, many Tri-B employees work in the soil with their hands, which means that most traditional input devices like card readers, PIN pads and even fingerprint readers simply do not work.

To create a physically robust system that would withstand both natural and human intervention, Qquest built "ruggedized" time clocks, installing hurricane covers to protect the machines.

Qquest's biometric hand reader was another must-have because it tackled two issues at once. First, it eliminated the ability of employees to buddy punch. The screen structure also prevents dirt and dust from being introduced into the device. And because the reader tracks employees by the size and shape of their hands instead of fine details like fingerprints, the device works on even the dirtiest hands.

Big Results: \$300,000+ in Savings

At first, the new time clocks ran up against employee resistance. Many had been using the manual punch clocks for over 10 years and were uncomfortable with the move to an electronic system. And some were unhappy that they would no longer be able to clock in for co-workers, or have others clock in for them.

Eventually, workers adjusted to the new system, and the results were significant. "After using TimeForce for just one year, we saw over \$300,000 in savings," said Watt. "The time we recouped by eliminating buddy punches alone was astounding. We also have much better information about how our employees work and what our labor costs really are."

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Watt also appreciated the personal attention he and his team received from Qqest.

“These kinds of transitions are never easy.

When working with vendors, a lot of the time we want A and they want to give us C,” he said. “Qqest was on the same page as we were from the beginning, and they set appropriate expectations so we knew what to anticipate. They were very honest about the work that needed to be done up front. They helped us walk before we ran.”

Tri-B’s experience with TimeForce has been so successful, the Berry Family of Nurseries is planning to roll it out to its other three divisions as well.

“TimeForce has been able to adapt to our unique challenges, while at the same time, giving us a level of control over payroll we hadn’t been able to achieve before,” said Watt. “It’s the best solution for the way we work.”