

# Cutler Associates Inc:

By his estimate, there is no comparison —  
Cutler's DeVito chooses Sage Timberline Office estimating over Excel

## Sage Timberline Office

John DeVito knows that when you have a good thing, you leverage it to the hilt.

Two years ago DeVito joined Cutler Associates as chief estimator for the firm's Scholastic Division. With nearly thirty years under his belt in the estimating field, DeVito was pleased to find that Cutler had the Sage Timberline Office estimating software. He was less excited to learn, however, that only two people were using it, and neither to its full capacity. The firm's other estimators were using Excel spreadsheets.

DeVito knew what his first priority would be.

"I committed to get everyone trained on the Sage Timberline Office software," said DeVito, who has since been promoted to director of preconstruction for the Scholastic Division. "Comparing Excel with Sage Timberline Office is like comparing a biplane to an F-16."

When he began to train the two users, DeVito saw that they were using the software only for budget purposes rather than to capture detailed line items.

"We would be content to plug in square footage and cost per square foot and use that to give us a budget estimate," he said. "Now we're using the software to produce more detailed line items that give us a precise read on each job."

As an example, DeVito ticked off various line items that he uses in estimating a typical new-construction job – trench excavation, backfill, cuts and fills, erosion control, fine grading. Each of those becomes an individual line item in the Timberline database.

"Excel only gives you macro-level numbers," he remarks. "But with Sage Timberline Office estimating, you can track every item to create an estimate that accurately reflects every facet of the job. I put in crews, equipment and production rates. I can look at the pricing in many different ways – line item level, phase level of group phase level."

Each time he uses the software, DeVito adds more line items. By his estimate, he has created 5,000 new line items over the last two years, a number that will continue to grow.

DeVito and his team take this exacting approach on every phase of the project.

"We do a site estimate like a subcontractor would do it," he said. "That gets us pretty close to what it will cost."

Once DeVito had trained the original two users, he asked them to train the estimators who were relying on Excel spreadsheets. Soon enough, the Sage Timberline Office estimating advantages became apparent to all.

"Sage Timberline Office estimating is a database. I can see every detail and can change any one of them, or any combination

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of them,” DeVito explained. “I can analyze and manipulate a line item any way I want, and then I can go back to the original.”

By contrast, DeVito pointed out, Excel is a flat file that lacks advanced functionality.

“With Excel you can’t drill into anything,” he remarked. “You can put a formula in, but to make any changes you have to go into the cell. If you create a master estimate and you want to make a new item, you have to do it in two places – the new estimate and the master estimate. You can only copy and paste.”

Cutler now has about 15 people who are skilled with the software. That’s a valuable attribute for this thriving enterprise, which generates about \$120 million in annual revenue across the scholastic, elder care and corporate industrial markets. Among the firm’s recently completed projects are the Mount Ida College Veterinary Technology Center in Newton, Mass.; a Visiting Nurses Association housing complex in Somerville, Mass; and the Methuen Assisted Living facility in Methuen, Mass.

DeVito’s team works on six to ten projects at a time, all private schools across New England and the mid-Atlantic states. Initial estimating on each job takes around two to three weeks. In many ways, DeVito said, estimating is the most important part of winning a job, because the estimate sets the tone for the project that follows.

“The Sage Timberline Office estimating software allows us to test a variety of design scenarios early in project development,” DeVito remarked. “We review each possibility in terms of function, cost and constructability to determine which options to pursue. By refining the project detail through the use of this process, we move quickly toward a design approach that meets the project goals and creates value for the owner.”

DeVito also commended his Sage software partner, United Solutions of Marlborough, Mass. The firm provides service on both the Sage Timberline Office estimating module and the accounting software used by Cutler.

“United Solutions is in constant communication with us,” DeVito

said. “They use email to keep me posted about maintenance issues. I have used that information to avoid some problems.”

DeVito called the software one key to Cutler’s success.

“The software gives us a very high level of confidence in the numbers we put together,” he observed. “You can’t put a price on that.”

#### CORPORATE PROFILE

**Headquarters:** Worcester, MA

**Type of Business:** Design-and-build construction firm

**Website:** cutlerassociatesinc.com

**Software:** Sage Timberline Office Accounting, Job Cost, Payroll, Reporting & Inquiry Suite, Estimating Extended, Model Estimating

**“THE SOFTWARE GIVES US A VERY HIGH LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE IN THE NUMBERS WE PUT TOGETHER. YOU CAN’T PUT A PRICE ON THAT.”**

**– John DeVito, director of preconstruction, Cutler Associates**

#### CHALLENGE

Make full use of the Sage Timberline Office estimating software at this leading design-and-build construction firm.

#### SOLUTION

Train all estimators in how to use the software, enabling them to graduate from Excel spreadsheets.

#### RESULTS

A thorough, efficient estimating process that helps control costs, drives faster delivery and promotes owner satisfaction.