

## Working with Technology Firms

CISS execs have noted several factors that enable Maslo to extract the maximum benefits from CISS's computer expertise:

- Reasonableness and Patience
- Punch Lists
- Monthly Internal Technology Meetings

When asked why Maslo was able to gain so much from its relationship with CISS, Spalding cited that the managers "are generally reasonable and patient." This allowed the initial implementation to take place through a series of steps, gave Maslo employees time to become accustomed to the changes, and enabled CISS personnel to fine-tune features and troubleshoot problems before rolling out the next phase. Although firms are frequently in a rush to take advantage of new technology, a full-scale implementation oftentimes spells chaos and does not go smoothly. Gradual rollout also meant smaller technology bills for Maslo rather than a large initial investment.

Another important factor that allows Maslo and CISS personnel to work together effectively is the use of punch lists. With these, both sides have the same set of projects, priorities, and time lines. These lists are constantly updated as projects are completed, added, or reprioritized. This technique gives both Maslo and CISS a clear understanding of what needs to be accomplished and when.

The final factor that allows more effective use of technology is Maslo's monthly internal technology meetings. During these meetings, employees are able to discuss what they require from the computer system in order to perform their jobs efficiently and to point out any weaknesses in the current system. Maslo managers can then take some of these issues to CISS where they may become future projects and are added to the punch list.

## Choosing from Technology Providers

Maslo had an easier time finding third-party computer support than most firms. Maslo management had met Ben Spalding prior to the formation of CISS and had the opportunity to observe his work firsthand while he was employed by one of their vendors.

Other companies may not be so fortunate. Important questions to consider when choosing a technology provider are:

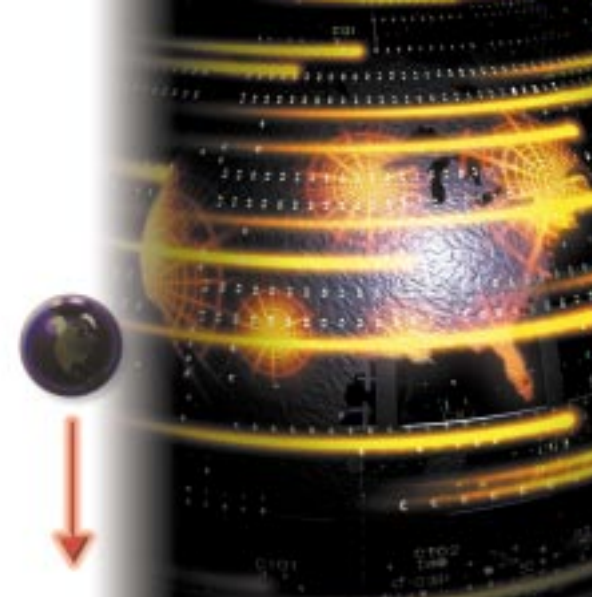
- Does it have the knowledge to do the job?
- Is it large enough to meet the company's needs?
- Does it provide the necessary services?
- What is its reputation?

Every organization has differing needs in these categories and it is crucial to choose a firm capable of providing the required services in a professional manner.

Originally a family-owned business, Maslo takes pride in its superior products and service and forms business relationships with similarly minded firms. Maslo execs feel that Ben Spalding and CISS meet and exceed their exacting standards.

## Conclusion

Decision makers in small to mid-sized businesses need to harness technology to increase productivity and take the headache out of maintaining an office computer network. Often the most cost-effective solution is a knowledgeable computer firm such as CISS. This type of firm—one capable of supporting hardware, recommending software, networking, and customizing software packages—can be fully utilized as Maslo uses CISS, or it can be hired to consult on a specific project. Such flexibility allows a company to unlock its true growth potential.



## Case Study:



## Maslo Profits from the Computer Age

Founded in 1978, Maslo Company, Inc., is a full-service, "recovered paper" reseller based in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania. Almost 80% of Maslo's business is "brokerage"—moving paper from point to point without the reseller ever physically taking ownership of the material. Started as a family business, Maslo has grown into a company that buys and sells over 250,000 tons of scrap paper every year. Although much of that paper never crosses Maslo's threshold, those lots still need to be tracked and recorded while the product is in transit. The paper that does arrive on site must be weighed, classified, and entered into inventory and the vendor must be credited. Each particular lot is then reprocessed and/or shipped to the buyer.

Maslo was generating its own mountain of paperwork trying to keep on top of the large quantity of shipments coming into the warehouse and the orders going out. In addition, Maslo needed to find faster ways to answer client questions such as how much of a particular paper was in stock or if there was a buyer for a specific lot. Having no way to get a real-time picture of accounts payable and receivable was also a problem for Maslo executives.

Like any other company, Maslo had much to gain from computer technology. Its executives saw the need for a computer network with integrated software packages where data would be entered only once and reports could be generated in minutes rather than days. However,

like many small to mid-sized businesses, Maslo lacked the funds for a full-time computer person, and none of Maslo's current employees had the computer savvy nor the time to put together the much-needed computer network and to shop around for the appropriate software products necessary to increase productivity.

Maslo's first foray into the tech world was to hire a retired IBM employee as a consultant to set up a network and inventory system. This attempt failed. Because the man was no longer working in the industry, his knowledge was dated and did not include the networking skills required to provide the desired functionality.

## Operating in the Crudest Sense

The solution was to hire the newly formed CISS, Ltd., which would be responsible for setting up a reliable computer network, installing cutting-edge business software, and creating a customized database that would allow instant access to crucial vendor, buyer, and business information.



For more information and to preview our software, visit us at [www.cissltd.com](http://www.cissltd.com)



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Prior to 1995 and the hiring of CISS, Maslo was utilizing a very low level of technology. The day-to-day operation was largely paper-based, frustrating, and restrictive to growth. The basic computer infrastructure was severely out of date and unreliable: inventory was tracked via a program that was little more than a spreadsheet, the network was a daisy chain of 10b2 lines, payables and receivables were handled using a stand-alone computer program, and the server was noted mainly for its crashes. All personnel involved were overworked and harried by vendor and customer requests for more information, and, perhaps the most frustrating of all, no one knew the state of the business at the end of the day. The company was operating in what vice president and general office manager Robert S. Loose, Jr., summed up as “the crudest sense.”



home or office.) An integrated accounting interface known as Sage's Business Works was also added for accounts payable and receivable.

Although the other areas offered much to Maslo employees, the users are most impressed and satisfied with the inventory tracking/order processing software. Based in MS Access, this customized package gives Maslo the flexibility it needs to process orders, track inventory, and get real-time sales figures or at-a-glance inventory reports. This “cradle-to-grave” transaction program ties inventory to actual orders. Maslo's customized software product contains many of the features available in CISS's Inventory Pro. Both products are inte-



In 1995, Ben Spalding, cofounder of CISS, began working as a consultant to Maslo. He immediately assessed Maslo's needs and set about turning the “technologically challenged” office into a “technologically sophisticated” business. Through a series of steps, Spalding created a computer environment that has enabled Maslo to increase its volume of business, increase profits, and actually expand to a second office several states away. Spalding focused on three areas that required immediate attention: infrastructure, auxiliary software, and inventory tracking/order processing software.

### Tapping into Computer Technology

The infrastructure changes involved reconfiguring/purchasing computers, upgrading the server, and upgrading the network. Understanding a small business's desire to keep costs down, Spalding was able to reuse or reconfigure all of the existing hardware, including five 486-25MHz PCs. Several up-to-date PCs were added later for the employees who did not previously have desktop computers. The environment was changed from OS/2 with Lotus 1,2,3 as the main software package to Windows 95 and MS Office. To eliminate the slowness of the previous network, Spalding upgraded to 10bT network hubs.

In addition to the infrastructure updates, Spalding added auxiliary software products that are essential in today's computer environment. These included faxing software, antivirus software, and automated backup software. (Many smaller companies do not have those vital pieces of software; however, antivirus and backup software with a tape backup system is essential for every computer,

grated with the web so users at remote sites are able to access them and additional users can be added without paying for another license.

Since the inception of these changes, Maslo has gone from processing 550 orders per month to 850 per month. That equates to a 54% increase. And while the actual volume of paper handled has increased from 11,000 tons per month to 17,000 tons per month, Maslo needed to hire only one new office assistant to process these additional orders.

In addition, Maslo opened a second office in North Carolina and hired several field salespeople. These employees are able to connect to Maslo's home office and inventory tracking/order processing software via the Internet.

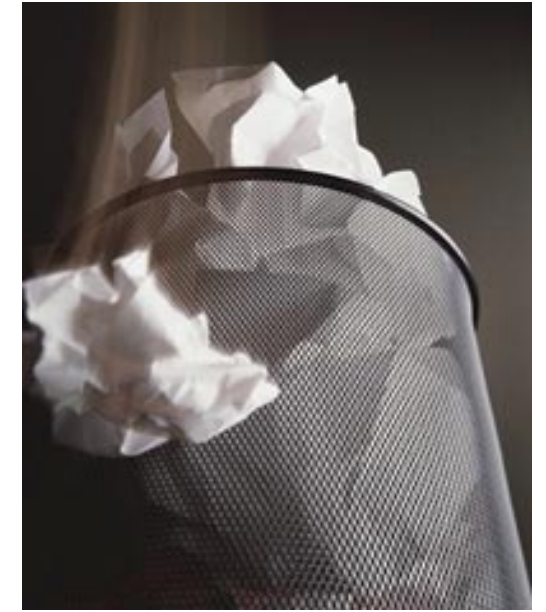
### Harnessing the Internet

CISS has also added several features to allow Maslo to make use of the vast potential of the Internet. CISS has set up a web-based Internet server with a DSL connection at Maslo headquarters. This server hosts the company website, employee email accounts, and other web services.

Along with standard web server features, Maslo maximizes its use of the Internet through a special interface developed by CISS. This interface gives Maslo employees and execs access to their customized inventory tracking/order processing software when they are at home or on the road. The web interface offers any user on a PC/Mac running a browser on the Internet the same functionality as the LAN-based, MS-Access application running in Maslo's headquarters. An employee is able to connect to the inventory/order database evenings and weekends to check things such as contact information or company reports. The user simply types the URL, enters an assigned username and password, and has access to the same information available at the office.

The next phase in Internet development will be to set up an information site where customers can access real-time order and shipment status. A shopping cart interface may also be established to offer available inventory to customers. This will give clients a place to look up important information without having to contact the Maslo office and a place where orders can be taken 24 hours a day with no employee interaction.

**IPOL** is capable of exchanging information with third-party applications on a multiplatform basis using a new industry-wide BizTalk™ initiative sponsored by major Internet players including Microsoft™. **IPOL** also supports the popular IBM MQ Series™ package. Other third-party messenger services or electronic data interchange (EDI) formats can be supported on a custom basis.



### Maintaining the Technological Edge

In order to keep Maslo's computer network on the cutting edge, CISS maintains regular contact with Maslo and, through monthly office visits, performs software/network updates that add to the functionality of the customized software. As the volume of data increases, CISS increases the size of the server and updates its software accordingly. CISS personnel are also able to access crucial Maslo computers through remote access software when necessary. This decreases down time and cuts costs because a CISS staff member is able to troubleshoot a problem or reset a system without making an in-person service call.

Originally, Maslo planned to maintain its own computers; however, currently CISS maintains all of the fifteen or so desktops, the NT servers, the web server, and all of the Internet components. At a later date, Maslo may decide to maintain the computers in-house, but for now it finds CISS's service to be cost effective and far superior to what it could provide itself.

Through their relationship with CISS, Maslo executives now have a state-of-the-art computer network. They are able to make informed choices when confronted with new technology and have computer sup-



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