



## Sparr Building and Farm Supply

*Enjoys high performance and high availability of IT and Spruce software*

For the past 20 years, a local Florida building material and farm supply store has enjoyed high performance and high availability of their Spruce software applications with minimal staff while outsourcing the majority of IT support to Scantron Technology Solutions. As a community resource, they are a major supplier to the state of Florida.

### Background

Sparr Building and Farm Supply, based in north central Florida, operates from three locations and is in its 70th year in business. Sparr employs 120 people with a team of outside sales representatives doubling as specialty farm consultants, most of whom have agricultural animal science degrees.

In addition to lumber, hardware, and other building materials, Sparr supplies feed for livestock including 54 breeds of horses, cattle, exotic pets like elephants, ostriches, tortoises, monkeys, big cats, and more.

Since the early 1990s, they have relied on Spruce, a lumber and building material software, for business accounting, including inventory, point-of-sale, account management and invoicing. Paul Howard and his brother, Sam Howard, second-generation co-owners, witnessed the application's evolution from a UNIX solution to the Microsoft Windows platform.

### Challenge

Before discovering Scantron Technology Solutions at a Spruce user conference, Sparr managed all IT in-house. Howard followed Spruce's recommendation of STS as a support vendor. Since security and availability were prominent considerations, he felt it was wise to align the company with a partner who stood behind these values.



#### Customer Overview

**70-year-old private company**  
**Three locations in north central Florida**  
**120 personnel, mostly full-time**  
**ECi Spruce business management software**  
**Office 365 early adopter**  
**Key supplier to state of Florida**

Having a technology vendor with depth and discipline was important. "I want to see us continue to grow," Howard says. "There's not a perfect roadmap for technology for most businesses. It's a constantly evolving trade. You have to align yourself with people of an adaptive mindset to succeed in business."

***"I see it as a cost of doing business. If you're going to have tech, you need the right support. Scantron is a large resource that allows us to grow without IT service falling behind. I think any business of my size should partner with a quality IT provider to be successful."***

*Paul Howard, Vice President, Sparr Building and Farm Supply*

## Outsourced Technology Services Return on Investment

### Hardware Services

- Better productivity and availability through reduced downtime and proactive maintenance
- Reduced total cost of ownership through effective lifecycle management
- PC, server, printer and other device maintenance
- Prompt, reliable depot repair

### Managed IT Services

- Peace of mind and productivity
- Layered security, business continuity, and high performance
- Anti-virus, anti-malware and phishing detection measures
- Remote helpdesk
- Cloud based backup and recovery

### Implementations & Projects

- Enabling growth through adaptive IT strategy and extended roadmap
- Empowering existing resources to scale
- High quality, durable specialty hardware installations
- Smooth hardware and productivity software upgrades



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*Paul Howard, Vice President, Sparr Building and Farm Supply*

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Sparr places a premium on continuity. “We are defensive in our posture and try to stay ahead of the curve in adopting best practices, keeping the network running, preventing downtime and enabling operations. It is important to me that things run as smoothly as possible.”

“Keeping a finger on the pulse of technology isn’t the only thing. Employees have high expectations for technology performance too. Our staff depends on functioning IT equipment to provide the best standard of customer service possible.”

## **Solution**

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Sparr contracted with STS to support their mission-critical Spruce instance, the network infrastructure, point-of-sale terminals, and end user devices at all locations. STS updated the relevant hardware, software, and network while coordinating with Sparr’s IT personnel.

Using good acquisition strategies has resulted in a sound environment and cost savings over time. One example is the POS terminals. “We’re still using the same thin clients we installed in 2007. Terminals were more expensive than PCs, but they’re very reliable.” To better secure the network, STS also recommended disabling the USB ports.

STS keeps Sparr’s IT environment healthy with reliable platforms and security by performing server upgrades and providing cloud-based backup and recovery.

To streamline application management, Sparr was a relatively early adopter of Microsoft Office 365. “It’s nice to turn subscriptions on and off,” says Howard. “We don’t have to worry about versions and updates, encryption and security are good, and we get plenty of storage. It’s a good option if you have a reliable internet connection.”

Not only has STS kept the network and applications available and secure, but it has also delivered outstanding hardware service. Howard recalls a typical example.

“We once sent a laptop to be repaired. When we got it back, the box wasn’t opened for a while. When we did, we discovered that the screen was broken. Your manager made it right. If I was with some other vendor, we would have just had to take a loss and replace the laptop because we didn’t catch it immediately. It may have even been the fault of the shipper. But that kind of problem solving is something we do every day in our business. It’s not about dollars and cents, it’s about doing what’s right. At the end of the day, you’ll keep that person as a customer. Scantron has done that.”



**“You either hire more people or you outsource more. That decision was quite easy to make. Working with STS made it possible for us to be more effective and handle additional responsibility by partnering with someone who had the resources, rather than hiring someone else in house.”**

*Paul Howard, Vice President, Sparr Building and Farm Supply*

## **Results and Ongoing Impact**

Today the IT environment supports Sparr during even the most challenging circumstances. “We’re an emergency supplier to the state. During Hurricane Irma, we ran everything on premise. We had connectivity via phone and the server patched through to branch store locations. We had a little downtime, but were able to serve our customers the next day.

In fact, Sparr was the only store in the region that was open on the day of Hurricane Irma. “At one branch, we were able to serve customers the day of the hurricane as it moved away.”

As time passed and business grew, STS made recommendations based on annual reviews and gradually expanded services. Howard credits STS with empowering their IT staff to scale to support three locations. “You either hire more people or you outsource more. That decision was quite easy to make,” says Howard. “Working with STS made it possible for us to be more effective and handle additional responsibility by partnering with someone who had the resources, rather than hiring someone else in house.”

Howard expresses a high degree of confidence in the relationship, with emphasis on quality, transparency and honesty. “STS is a trusted vendor partner. Everybody makes mistakes, but when you do, you’re honest about it. It has never been an issue to reach you or get someone on site when needed.”



As Sparr continues to grow, he doesn’t hesitate to renew the service agreement. “I see it as a cost of doing business. If you’re going to have tech, you need the right support. Scantron is a large resource that allows us to grow without IT service falling behind. I think any business of my size should partner with a quality IT provider to be successful.”



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