

nisc

CASE STUDY

JACKSON ELECTRIC MEMBERSHIP CORPORATION

A CASE STUDY ON IMPLEMENTATION BEST PRACTICES



SUMMARY:

Jackson Electric Membership Corporation, headquartered in Jefferson, Ga., replaced its best of breed software with NISC's enterprise software after a thorough vetting of potential technology partners. The co-op then employed several best practices leading up to and during the implementation that greatly contributed to the success of the project.



Carla Mumm, National Information Solutions Cooperative

“One Jackson EMC.”

It’s a saying the employees of Jackson Electric Membership Corporation have, and means that everyone at Jackson EMC—the Board, executives, staff—is in it together, jointly celebrating the highs and supporting each other during the lows.

Equally unified is the cooperative’s entire business technology system, now under one umbrella: NISC’s enterprise software solution.

Since implementation of NISC’s enterprise software in 2019, Jackson EMC is enjoying paperless workflows, a more mobile workforce and higher levels of member engagement. Of particular note, however, is how the cooperative arrived at the decision to partner with NISC, and how Jackson EMC prepared for the huge undertaking that is wholesale software conversion and implementation.



...everything that we need, as well as our customers’ information, is found in one software solution.

Sheconda Benton,
Jackson EMC business analyst

BEST OF BREED VS. ENTERPRISE APPROACH

Jackson EMC, headquartered in Jefferson, Ga., is one of the largest electric cooperatives in the United States. The cooperative is operated by approximately 450 employees in four district offices, and serves more than 231,100 meters spanning 10 counties.

Jackson EMC is a geographically diverse cooperative—which compounded the challenge of keeping each of the co-op’s best of breed software pieces updated and integrated. After an employee survey laid bare the facts, the co-op took action.

“We had exhausted our ability to keep up with technology in-house with our own resources, and we needed a partner to help us with that,” said Chip Jakins, Jackson EMC president and CEO. “We knew members would benefit if we were more integrated, and we had the support from the Board and the leadership team, so it wasn’t difficult to get the commitment to move forward. It was the obvious choice to move the cooperative forward.”

JACKSON EMC ENTERPRISE SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS TEAM

The Decision, by the Numbers:

- ▶ **1,200 – written questions asked of prospective firms**
- ▶ **100 – hours of team meetings**
- ▶ **75+ – employees interviewed about technology needs**
- ▶ **15 – full days of vendor demos**
- ▶ **9 – months to complete the process**
- ▶ **3 – industry-leading technology providers considered**
- ▶ **2 – days invested by leadership team in vetting cost and functionality of leading options**
- ▶ **1 – unanimous decision**

In 2016, an employee team born from Jackson EMC's Strategic Planning Process was asked to choose one of three paths—continue with the best of breed approach, transition to an enterprise solution or implement a hybrid approach.

The team homed in on enterprise solutions, and began a nine-month exhaustive evaluation. The vetting process included site visits to other co-ops and prospective partners, onsite software demonstrations, interviews with more than 75 employees to identify needs and a detailed evaluation of their current system infrastructure and work required to integrate and upgrade under a best of breed approach.

Three vendors emerged as candidates. In the end, the decision to partner with NISC was unanimous.

"NISC was up against some other enterprise solutions and clearly came out in front with the functional requirements that met our needs. And culturally, they're a great match for Jackson EMC and share our same member-first attitude," said Gerry Sidhom,



Michel'le Jackson, Jackson EMC

Jackson EMC director of business technology solutions.

In 2019, Jackson EMC implemented the full NISC product suite.

"We did a deep dive into the top vendor options out there, and I would encourage others to do the same. When you sit down with the leadership team of not only NISC, but their competitors, you'll start to see the distinction," Jakins said. "The more we got to know the people, the product, the leadership team, the culture, we knew that we were lining ourselves up with a true partner. That partnership made the big milestones feel better, and it made the bumps in the road easier. We knew we were partnering with a true technology firm and advanced technology partner that could really bring the latest and greatest technology to our cooperative."

IMPLEMENTATION BEST PRACTICES

A wholesale software swap is not an easy undertaking, but Jackson EMC's employees—and processes—were more than up to the task.



Darian Rakestraw, Jackson EMC

NISC's Carla Mumm, who served as NISC's enterprise project manager for the implementation project, noted several characteristics about Jackson EMC's approach to implementation that contributed to its success:

- ▶ employees were engaged early in the project;
- ▶ both members and employees of the co-op knew what to expect and were kept updated on the project's progress;
- ▶ the Jackson EMC Board of Directors were informed and supportive;
- ▶ Jackson EMC executives were engaged and provided visible support throughout implementation;
- ▶ and Jackson EMC remained flexible and used best practices whenever possible.

Jakins also stressed the importance of partners getting on the same page—which meant aligning project scope and deliverables, and establishing mutual trust.

"We don't do software conversions every day, but NISC does, so we felt it was important to listen to our partner up front and consider some best practices, be flexible, and be willing to invest the necessary time and resources to ensure a successful project," Jakins said.

"I suggest trying not to change the software to meet your will," Sidhom added. "Custom modifications made our best of breed software hard to upgrade, so one of the project tenets was to make sure we implemented best practices as much as possible. Trust in NISC—they've been through this process before, and their project implementation managers truly have your best interest at heart."

Mumm lauded Jackson EMC's willingness to consider implementation best practices, adapt their processes to help fit the enterprise solution, and the example set by the co-op's leadership from the start.

"(Jackson EMC Vice President of Information Technology) Jeff Keen, the project's executive sponsor, was a huge part of the success of this project. And every time it was all hands on deck, Chip Jakins was there in his baseball hat and blue

JACKSON EMC'S IMPLEMENTATION PREP BEST PRACTICES:

- ▶ Do a deep dive on partner options
- ▶ Manage implementation as a project
- ▶ Engage employees early
- ▶ Communicate with members
- ▶ Executives provide visible support
- ▶ Utilize best practices where possible

jeans digging in with the employees and all the other Jackson EMC executive team members," Mumm said. "Everyone saw the executive team's support and I think that made a huge difference in this project."

'MORE THAN IMPLEMENTING SOFTWARE'

Jakins shared a story about presenting to the Jackson EMC Board following go-live toward the end of 2019.

"For the first time in as long as anyone in the room could remember, we were current on every single software product that we had. Not to mention, all of those products talk to each other seamlessly, from the field to the back office and everywhere in-between. We weren't ever able to say that before."

"Our Accounting and Business Solutions, Consumer Information System, Outage Management System—they all talk with each other," said Sheconda Benton, Jackson EMC business analyst. "Having that under one umbrella has been a wonderful thing. And that's going to propel us forward, because everything that we need, as well as our customers' information, is found in one software solution."

Jackson EMC's members have responded favorably to the technology upgrade. Prior to partnering with NISC, about 20,000



Gerry Sidhom, Jackson EMC



Katelyn Galloway & Kristen Gooch, Jackson EMC

Jackson EMC members were receiving their bill electronically. A few months after full implementation of the NISC enterprise, nearly 100,000 members were paying electronically. In addition, about 92,000 members had taken advantage of the SmartHub app, which Jackson EMC has branded the “My Jackson EMC” app, to make payments and monitor their usage.

The leap in member engagement corresponded with 93 percent of the co-op’s members reporting high satisfaction with their service from Jackson EMC—their highest JD Power Ranking to date.

“We did so much more than implementing software with this project,” Sidhom said. “We were building relationships. We were changing the organization. Personally, this project was a career-

changing endeavor. It really helped ‘One Jackson EMC’ hit home for me, and we exemplified that by how we all came together to implement the NISC enterprise software solution.”

“It was a very large and expansive project that touched every employee here, and we really demonstrated our ability to pull together as a team and deliver when we have a challenge put in front of us,” Jakins said. “We’re more connected as a company than we have ever been before, and our systems are more integrated than they ever have been before. We’re happy with the outcome.”

To learn more about NISC’s commitment to Members, or for more information about our iVUE enterprise software products and services, please visit www.nisc.coop or email sales@nisc.coop.

