

Kevin Harris Architect, LLC.

Story of an Architect Tackling the Business of Architecture

Specializing in residential renovation architecture, Kevin Harris, Architect, L.L.C., and his staff of 15, today shine under a halo of satisfied clients. Their designs built an exceptional reputation, spreading positive word-of-mouth across the region and making it easier to win new projects.

It was not always this way. Eight years ago Kevin and his wife, Liz, were not even sure whether they were billing costs. Staff were delinquent with time sheets. Cost and other information was not readily available or untimely. For a time Kevin and Liz generated invoices using Microsoft Word, made two copies, then sent one to the client and kept the other in a notebook. When payments came in, notes were added to invoices. Questions like “How much revenue are staff generating compared to their experience?” could not be answered. In short, as Kevin built his firm’s reputation, he wondered if he had billed enough and would stay in business.

“My architecture is not a commodity market,” Kevin admits.

“Before, I was like a lot of architects and designers—reluctant to charge for my services. I realized that if I didn’t charge more for the impressive designs my clients loved, I wouldn’t be in business very long. BillQuick helped us.”

Needing to track time, costs and projects so he could at least bill what a project cost, Kevin and Liz Harris took steps to master the business of architecture. Attending a Harvard Executive Course and other education events, Kevin came away knowing he needed an integrated system for time and billing. Moreover, he learned that business answers he sought, not only for the survival of his firm but to make it flourish, would change and mature as he moved forward. Not only was it important to know if an invoice submitted to a client covered the project’s cost, it was important to know the value of his efforts. He needed information to manage rapidly executed projects. Information to answer profitability, staff utilization and realization, and other questions. Information to empower his staff.

“For a small practitioner who starts out running the system on their own, BillQuick has low barriers to entry - low cost, low maintenance inside the firm, support services, and strong ease of use. BillQuick has real feature depth. Mid-sized and larger firms would benefit too. The real power is its layers of features. We wouldn’t have built up our firm like we have with Excel and Word.”

Kevin Harris
Principal

Kevin checked out other solutions before BillQuick.

After the Harvard Executive Course, I looked at other software. We struggled with one leading package. We thought maybe we were doing something wrong, so we talked to architects in the region who used it. They had full-time accountants maintaining the system. We would have done better wrecking my car or tearing up a \$10,000 bill.

Liz adds, "That was four years ago. BillQuick has proven itself a superior solution for our small firm. We maintain the system with our own staff and occasional calls to BillQuick Support. The software is highly affordable; no compromise on features. And you don't need advanced knowledge like SQL or Crystal Reports for BillQuick to be effective and help you make better business decisions.

Harris accessed each layer methodically. Initially only time was captured in BillQuick. This evolved into capturing expenses such as blueprinting reproduction, copies, sub-consultants and so on. Within a few months the firm began to bill clients through BillQuick. Then three years ago they started breaking projects into phases with caps (maximum contract amounts). Built-in processing rules monitor fixed-type phases and projects. When a time or expense entry pushes a phase or project over the maximum amount, BillQuick turns amounts above the cap into non-billable entries. Essentially, a red flag goes up, making monitoring and management easier.

"When we go over a phase cap," Kevin says, "we know immediately how much time we need to make up in later phases. We also take that information, determine why it went over, then take corrective action to minimize the risk of it happening again.

Of course, managing phase status and other details is tough when you're in the field with clients and prospects like I am. BillQuick came through again. Real-time information allows staff to monitor their own time.

"If there is extra time in a phase, it may be used to improve skills, add a little more dazzle to a client's design, or be held over for possible overruns in later phases.

"That's why we like BillQuick—it's the easiest way we've found to support the business of architecture for professionals busy being architects."

Liz Harris
Administrator

About Kevin Harris Architect, LLC.

Founded in 1982, Kevin Harris, Architect, L.L.C., of Baton Rouge, LA, is a full service design firm specializing in residential renovations, residential new construction, and the adaptive reuse of older buildings. The firm also has a background in specialty commercial and historic preservation projects. The firm provides quality architectural services while working to improve the built environment for the firm and their neighbors: one family, one building at a time. The firm's work has been featured on HGTV's syndicated programs "Before and AFTER", "Curb Appeal", and "New Spaces," as well as TCI Cablevision's "Homeowner Magazine." Renovation projects have graced the national covers of Frontgate Catalog and REMODELING magazine. Projects have received national, regional, state and local design awards.

“What IT comes down to is we have information with which to manage—to improve our business,” Kevin says. “For example, staff might get bored and add something to the schematic, like a gazebo that would never be built and didn’t add value to the client. BillQuick gives us information to analyze what we did and make qualitative decisions about whether using the extra time adds value to the client.”

“Our latest advance,” Liz says, “is tracking Earned Value and related information. Using hours burned on a project from BillQuick, Kevin meets with staff, determines percent complete for a project, then immediately knows its earned value against the contract amount. A few comparisons is all it takes to keep things in check. BillQuick includes its own Earned Value reports too.”

Kevin sums it up this way: “The bottom line is BillQuick allows us to keep a design focus in our firm and stay in business, rather than have a business focus and a bunch of hamsters on the drawing board drawing away. Our people now see the big picture. When they have an idea, they ask: Does it add value to the client? And with real-time information from BillQuick, they know where they stand on a project. If they burned 60% of the hours for a project, they can answer whether they are 60% done. They allocate their time and dynamically manage profit without being micro-managed. Another benefit is empowered staff stay with the firm.”

About BQE Software

BQE Software is a world leader in time tracking, billing, and project management software for professional services firms. Its products, including BillQuick®, ArchiOffice®, and EngineerOffice®, simplify the way information is entered and utilized by firms. With over 350,000 users, BQE is the trusted solution worldwide for architects, engineers, accountants, attorneys, IT consultants and business consultants. The company is headquartered in Torrance, California with offices in Australia and Europe.

World Headquarters

North & South America

3825 Del Amo Boulevard, Torrance, CA 90503
United States of America

Tel: (866) 945-1595 (toll-free)
+1 (310) 602-4010

Email: sales@bqe.com
support@bqe.com

For more information, visit
www.bqe.com or call
(866) 945-1595.

www.bqe.com
www.twitter.com/BillQuick
www.facebook.com/BillQuick

©2017 BQE Software Inc. All rights reserved.
BQE, BQE logo and BillQuick logo are
registered trademarks and/or registered
service marks of BQE Software Inc. in the
United States and other countries. Other
parties' trademarks or service marks are the
property of their respective owners.

Regional Offices

Australia, New Zealand & Asia

Level 40 North Point Towers, 100 Miller Street, North Sydney NSW 2060
Australia

Tel: 1300 245 566 (toll-free)
+61 (02) 9657 1355

Email: aus-sales@bqe.com
aus-support@bqe.com

Europe, Middle East & Africa

Tel: +44 20 3318 8111

Email: uk-sales@bqe.com
uk-support@bqe.com