Company of the Month: EMPOWER NY continues to revolutionize code compliance and violation management

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Real estate in N.Y.C. has never been simple. Any seasoned management veteran is all too familiar with daily headaches that are unique to the Big Apple. But, as regulations increase, and margins grow tighter, it seems that the job of owners and managers is only getting harder. That unique, but exciting mess, inspired three entrepreneurs to build EMPOWER NY and help N.Y.C. property owners and managers efficiently and effectively manage their portfolios. What began as a solution to automate and simplify code compliance and N.Y.C. violation management has blossomed into a multi-service industry powerhouse, trusted by owners and managers across the city.

Founded in 2008, EMPOWER actually invented an entire new industry in the form of proactive, automated violation management and code compliance. Charlie Krause, a veteran property manager, is one of the founding partners. "We honestly couldn't believe that no one had filled the need already," said Krause, "My staff was literally spending hours manually collecting data and putting it into spreadsheets." With actual real-world management experience to build on, the development team behind EMPOWER created a truly revolutionary set of tools, allowing managers to automate many daily tasks that would otherwise cost time, money, and additional office staff.

Before EMPOWER, managers were only aware they had received a violation when it arrived by mail. Worse yet, they were completely in the dark when complaints were called in to 311. EMPOWER continually monitors an unmatched and dizzying array of city and state agencies, collecting new complaints, violations, charges, due dates, status changes and dozens of other compliance data points. EMPOWER's speed is mind-bogglingly impressive, alerting users to new DOB complaints, for example, literally within minutes of the call being placed to 311 - way before a city inspector is even dispatched. With that critical knowledge in hand, managers can quickly remedy the issue before the inspector arrives and avoid a costly violation or stop-work order altogether.

Trying to revolutionize an industry doesn't come easy. Dave Gross, president and CTO, is also a founding partner. "When we map out our approach and design, we are very conscious of respecting our users' existing workflows," said Gross. "Many of our clients have been doing things a certain way for a long time. Our job is to find a balance between helping them do it more efficiently, while fitting in gracefully with their day-to-day operations."

In recent years, some other names have cropped up in the N.Y.C. violation monitoring space, offering a few, but nowhere near, the features that EMPOWER does. "If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then consider us extremely flattered," said Jack Wurtzel, founding partner and CEO. "We knew we had something special when some less powerful products came on the market and tried to compete. Many of them continue to market their solutions as 'similar' to EMPOWER. But our customer base speaks for itself. No one comes close on number of features, agency coverage or

user experience."

EMPOWER has actually witnessed a shift in how the New York City property management community approaches agency compliance. "In the past, our biggest challenge was convincing the industry that there was real value in having this knowledge at their fingertips," said Sruli Geldwerth, vice president of business development, "Many managers were content with their reactive approach. Today, thanks to our efforts, companies are actually seeking us out to help them manage their portfolios more proactively."

That is illustrated by how customers have come to regard the EMPOWER team as experts in New York real estate law and regulations. "We get calls everyday from users who are simply looking for guidance on local laws, and we're more than happy to help," said Wurtzel. When EMPOWER hosts training sessions at their midtown offices, they spend just as much time explaining the nuances of N.Y.C. real estate regulations as they do demonstrating the system. That level of expertise is ensured by "EMPOWER University" - a month long, mandatory employee training program that includes courses on local law compliance and N.Y.C. property management given by experienced industry professionals.

While collecting data from multiple agencies into one cohesive cloud based portal is an obvious time saver, the team behind EMPOWER saw beyond the value of simply being data aggregators. They developed a collection of online tools and offline services that allow their users to actually interact with the data and integrate it into their property management workflow. EMPOWER offers value added services such as annual safety notice mailings and an automated tenant call center. "By offering tangible solutions, such as hearing representation or negotiated penalty reductions," said Moshe Stareshefsky, vice president of client services. "We can go beyond alerting users of violations and hearings, but allow them to take action as well, all while being fully integrated with the EMPOWER system."

EMPOWER invests heavily in research and development to further expand their software and client services. "While we've been first to market with every innovation, tool, and feature, being first isn't enough," said Dave Gross, "We've spent over a million dollars on research alone, ensuring that we are not only the industry leader, but we literally set the industry standard."

In a few short years, EMPOWER has created an industry, continued to lead it through innovation, and grown to monitor over 1.2 billion s/f of commercial and residential real estate for some of the largest and most prestigious names in New York City property management. And they don't show any signs of slowing down.