The Challenge:
- Tenant move-in and move-out tasks were manually entered and tracked in Excel which had no automated workflow functionality or real-time reporting
- No automated way to generate invoices in QuickBooks from Excel spreadsheets
- No streamlined way of communicating tasks to staff

The Solution:
- Automated email alerts keep tasks and deadlines on track
- Integration of QuickBase with QuickBooks automated invoice generation
- Web-based applications allowed CIC to operate remotely via laptops from temporary office space during an emergency evacuation of its office building

The Results:
- Saved $200,000 on custom application development
- Reduced invoice generation time 400 percent
- Retained nearly all tenant business during six-week evacuation

Think-Tank Residency Opens Its Doors to Property Management Efficiency with QuickBase

Being an MIT graduate, Tim Rowe understood the lure of technology—and the critical importance of networking with others who shared his passion for innovation. He saw an opportunity to bring like-minded technology start-ups together with office space and infrastructure to facilitate peer interaction, while giving these fledgling companies a place to blossom and grow.

While the idea of bringing emerging technology companies together was exciting, the execution of the dream was a bit more complex. Managing the growing roster of CIC tenants meant managing a complex web of tenant contact information, equipment and service requirements, contracts and billing—data that needed constant monitoring and timely follow-up.

The Excel spreadsheets and “sticky note” method the company used to manage information and deadlines worked when CIC had fewer tenants, but as that number grew from 30 to 175, the manual system of information tracking became completely unworkable.

“There were dozens of different tenant requests, all of which could result in a task for us and a charge on the tenant’s bill. With Excel, there was no automated way to pull all that information,” said Tim Rowe, CEO. As a result, it took two CIC employees an entire week every month to generate tenant invoices.

Web-Based Functionality Keeps CIC Business Going—and Growing

In 2005, Rowe decided to replace his Excel spreadsheets with a web-based application that offered more automated functionality to support his growing business. He was already using QuickBooks and took a chance on QuickBase because he liked the online access, email alerts and easy user interface.

It took Rowe only six nights at home to develop an online database application to replace his Excel spreadsheets. The application was built from scratch with no assistance from IT staff or programmers.
“I was very excited to discover how powerful QuickBase was and the possibilities it opened up by putting application development directly in my hands,” said Rowe.

Instead of rolling the application out to employees, he handed it over to them, giving them all full administrative privileges to the application and telling them to change it as they saw fit. By turning the application refinement over to his employees, Rowe was able to eliminate the need for an IT “middleman,” saving time and money on application development—and resulting in a highly customized application that truly worked for his staff.

Rowe then gave limited application access to tenants, so they could input medical and emergency contact information, as well as preferences related to CIC service offerings.

While application flexibility was a big hit, QuickBase’s web-based functionality delivered the highest ROI by saving Rowe’s business from near disaster. A fire in the basement of the CIC building caused Rowe, his staff and all his tenants to evacuate the building for five weeks. Because his QuickBase application was web-based, Rowe was able to continue operations on laptops working out of local hotels.

“With QuickBase, we were able to access our application online and modify it to manage our tenants’ new equipment and services requirements in the temporary locations, ultimately saving us from losing their business,” said Rowe.

As his staff’s reliance on BlackBerrys increased, Rowe collaborated with a friend to create a robot application that made it possible for employees to send emails from their mobile devices to a “robot” PC that instructed QuickBase to add records or tasks to the application remotely, keeping employees highly productive outside of the office.

The innovation didn’t stop there. They also created a program to integrate their QuickBase application with Microsoft Exchange’s active directory, so email addresses would auto-populate when a user started typing the name, eliminating email typos and reducing the time needed to look up and type email addresses manually into the system.

And perhaps most important, Rowe developed an application to integrate QuickBase with QuickBooks, so he could automatically generate invoices based on QuickBase data, drastically reducing the time and resources needed to generate invoices while improving the accuracy of those bills.

**CIC Innovation with QuickBase Applications Results in Cost Savings and ROI**

Four years after launching his QuickBase application, Rowe’s business is thriving. With the integration of QuickBase with QuickBooks, it now takes only one employee one day to generate monthly tenant invoices, resulting in a 400 percent reduction in time and about $25,000 a year saved in valuable staff time.

Rowe was able to develop and launch the online database application himself, saving approximately $200,000 in programmer and developer costs. Since employees can modify the application themselves, it takes only 15 minutes to one hour to make changes, a significant improvement over the full day it could take with an outside programmer—an estimated savings of perhaps $200 per change.

And the fallout of the fire that could have destroyed his business? Thanks to QuickBase, there was none. Rowe was able to fulfill the contracts of all his tenants throughout the five-week ordeal, retaining nearly all of their business and the revenue that it generated.

But perhaps best of all, QuickBase fulfills a dream that Rowe has for technology to improve business rather than dictate it.