

Abergeldie



Abergeldie sets a foundation for growth

Just over sixteen years ago the Abergeldie group of companies was established to provide complex civil infrastructure and building contracts throughout eastern Australia. Since then it has developed an impressive track record of projects across a range of infrastructure including dams, bridges and marine, rail, electrical, process and mining.

Abergeldie management attributes the company's success to a simple philosophy of safely carrying out quality work and the ability to undertake complex projects with the systems, procedures, and professionalism of the major contractors but with the individuality and flexibility of a smaller company.

Problem

Thanks to good management and the construction boom of the past decade, Abergeldie has been growing at approximately 30 percent year-on-year. It's an excellent result for a comparatively young organisation but, back in 2009, it was also a performance destined to put pressure on the company's information management systems.

At the time Abergeldie was using a popular small business financial package and a mix of office productivity applications. Project managers created spreadsheets and databases to manage costs, billing and invoice data relating to each project. Purchase orders were issued manually and later matched to invoices that would first be received at Abergeldie's head office before being forwarded via mail to the project site for project manager approval.

To complicate matters, like many of its peers in the construction industry the Abergeldie group is made up of a number of companies. Each company handles a distinct area of the group's business, with all contributing to the success of client projects. Human resources matters, for example, are managed through the group's personnel arm which contracts staff to projects as required. Plant and equipment is owned by Abergeldie's equipment rental company. Each company documents its activities and recharges them to the appropriate project. It's a system that increases paperwork but which helps to ensure maximum recovery of costs.



ABERGELDIE
COMPLEX INFRASTRUCTURE

At a glance

Business Objective

To establish systems and processes capable of supporting the Abergeldie group of companies as it continues its 30% growth year-on-year.

Solution

- Microsoft Dynamics GP
- Microsoft Office SharePoint Server
- WennSoft Job Cost Series
- WennSoft Job Cost Portal
- WennSoft Project Management Portal
- WennSoft Equipment Series
- Workplace eProcurement
- KwikTag Document Imaging System

Business Benefits

- Abergeldie has a platform that will assist the company in its expansion, without requiring a corresponding increase in administrative staff
- Visibility into costs, income and profitability - by project and across companies - has substantially improved
- Imaging, automation and mobile technologies plus improved processes have reduced purchase order and invoice approval times, reducing administrative delays on construction sites
- Workflows and electronic approval processes are providing more control and greater consistency across the company

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With anywhere between 30 and 50 projects being undertaken at any given time, Abergeldie's systems were contributing to an increasing administrative overhead. Management could see that the more the company grew, the less efficient the systems would become. To circumvent problems it was decided to deploy a new enterprise wide system capable of supporting Abergeldie's anticipated growth; one that would facilitate the introduction of - and adherence to - standardised processes; and which offered a way of achieving operational and process efficiencies.

Solution

James Davies, Operations Manager for Abergeldie explains what happened next. "The finance department wrote up a specification which we took to four or five different companies. Some suggested specific construction industry packages. A couple of others recommended finance and ERP [enterprise resource planning] packages from small companies but we realised that if we wanted to make changes to the software we would have been limited in who we could work with."

Abergeldie selected a solution designed by Professional Advantage involving Microsoft Dynamics GP, Microsoft Office SharePoint Server and WennSoft job costing, project management and equipment management software. Davies acknowledges that the idea of a Microsoft-based solution was appealing, adding "We knew there are always lots of Microsoft suppliers and skills available. There's a surety about Microsoft."

In mid-2009 Abergeldie gave Professional Advantage the go-ahead for the six month project. Deployment was divided into two concurrent streams: Microsoft Dynamics GP and the WennSoft solutions were handled by one team, and SharePoint by another.

Davies notes, "The original scope changed slightly and the project grew as we began to realise what we could do with the applications." For example, a KwikTag document

imaging system was added to enable incoming mail and other documents to be scanned and circulated or forwarded electronically. Similarly, a web-based Workplace eProcurement application was introduced to facilitate viewing and approval of purchase orders by senior management over the Internet and via their mobile phones. Both technologies have helped to ensure faster approval cycles and improved communication with remote construction sites.

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Benefits

"It was a multi-faceted implementation, going far beyond financial management. It has caused a massive shift for the better in our operational processes and technology," Davies says. "It's giving us better records and more access to information on site. The system is helping our employees adhere to our purchase order workflow so if an order isn't raised in the Workplace system it doesn't get paid. Orders get automatically matched to invoices and it's reducing the opportunity for overpayment. If we want to know whether an account had been paid we used to have to ring Accounts. Now we jump onto Report Manager and we can see that information whenever we want to."

"When you think about the construction industry," Davies adds, "some people on the purchasing side are not always computer literate. A lot of our employees realise the advantages of what we've done and it is generally fairly well accepted. However there are some people who are going to take time to get used to it."

Davies suggests that at the big picture level, the most important benefit of the project is that it has given Abergeldie the scalable technology platform that it was seeking. It has also enhanced communication and introduced greater organisational agility.

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When it comes to the system's impact on day-to-day activities, there's been a noticeable increase in transparency of project finances. The new project management portal links straight into the job cost portal and it all integrates with Microsoft Dynamics GP. Davies says, "It's given us one place to do everything. It's a lot simpler and from a user perspective, is very easy to use."

Using SharePoint project managers can view up to date information on every aspect of their project including work to date and actual costs. In-built workflows ensure that if an order takes a job over budget, it must first be authorised by the appropriate manager. The same occurs if actual and committed costs go above the budgeted figure.

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Automated revenue recognition functionality in the WennSoft Job Cost software has reduced the previous volatility in managing and forecasting revenue, costs and profit. It also removes the need for project managers to edit data in the lead up to month end, and ensures that losses, overspending and profits remain visible.

"Previously we didn't always have all the costs accrued on our monthly reports so it was hard to know what was fully committed. This is giving us a lot more visibility into where jobs sit and earlier warning of situations where things might be out of control," Davies says.

In addition to its publishing role, SharePoint is also being used to improve systems and processes on construction sites. Automated forms and work flows, document management and version control measures all support the role of the project manager.

Managing rental equipment

Within Abergeldie Plant, the organisation's equipment rental arm, WennSoft Equipment Management Series is tying together equipment management, resource planning and financials.

Matthew Boyle, Abergeldie Plant Manager explains, "What we went from was fairly archaic. Maintenance, profitability and so on were managed separately using Microsoft Outlook calendars and Microsoft Access databases. It wasn't bad when it was just myself but we are growing. There was too much stored only in my head. If I got sick or went on leave the whole thing would have fallen down and a company can't grow like that. We needed standard ways of recording information. What Professional Advantage has introduced is a much more efficient invoicing system for plant and equipment hire."

At the beginning of each construction or infrastructure project, a hire rate and rental agreement is prepared to cover all major plant and equipment plus miscellaneous on costs such as transportation of the equipment or when arranging access to additional special items. The software captures all costs as they accrue and ensures accurate recharging.

"It makes dealing with Accounts and with others on site much easier," Boyle notes. "Any internal conflict over invoicing has gone. When someone signs off on equipment it becomes very clear that it went on hire on this date and off hire on that date. It increases our utilisation of equipment but perhaps the best function is that because it is tied into the accounting process, I get to see what the true value of an item is to me. I can see how much I get in rental; how much I spend on registration or repairs. I can see how profitable that piece of equipment is and how well we are utilising it. It helps me to know what I should buy next and when I should replace an item."

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Clients are also enjoying the fact that occupational health and safety data is easily documented and tracked by the new system. The ability to monitor and confirm maintenance is an important part of the new culture of risk management.

From a finance and reporting perspective, Boyle estimates that the software has reduced his end of month reporting time from two or three days down to one day. With increasing demands on his time, this kind of result is an important gain.

"I put a wish list of what I wanted from Professional Advantage and they've given me something that is light years from where I was. It's a really good system and compatible with all the other software being used at Abergeldie.

Having bedded down the system, Boyle is keen to explore new areas of functionality. In the near future he's hoping to introduce WennSoft's Service Module to help schedule plant maintenance functions.

An aggressive future

Since the project to bring new systems and processes to Abergeldie began, the company has continued to change. Another firm has been bought into the organisation and Abergeldie has established bigger and far more aggressive growth targets. "Our aim is to grow from being a \$100 million company to a \$300 million company within three years," Davies says. "With the solution designed by Professional Advantage, we have a platform to support that growth.

When asked about the relationship with Professional Advantage Davies enthuses, "I can't talk highly enough about the Professional Advantage employees we had on the project. It was well planned. We'd always get together once a week to go through any issues. They used an online portal as a central place to keep all correspondence relating to the project. The employees really knew their stuff and were always willing to help."

For more information

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