

Green Building Council of Australia



Business Growth Leads Green Building Council To Microsoft Dynamics GP

The Green Building Council of Australia (GBCA) is a national, not-for-profit organisation committed to developing a sustainable property industry for Australia by encouraging the adoption of green building practices. Uniquely supported by both industry and governments across the country, this forward-thinking organisation promotes green building programs, technologies and design practices. It offers education, technical manuals and certification programs with the aim of integrating green initiatives into mainstream design, construction and operation of buildings.

A growing maturity

Established in 2002 in the middle of an economic boom and at a time of growing green-consciousness, GBCA had to grow up quickly. Property industry interest in sustainability information saw GBCA's turnover grow from just \$450,000 in its first year to approximately \$9.5 million in 2011. The organisation's number and range of services expanded and at the same time GBCA learned to establish the right supporting systems, processes and tools to underpin its growth.

Stephen Thatcher, who joined GBCA as Director of Finance and Operations in mid-2008 explains, "We had extremely fast growth over the last eight or nine years, particularly during 2007 to 2008 when we went from having seven staff to over forty."

On Thatcher's arrival at GBCA one of his first observations was that the company's financial needs were becoming much more complex than the existing financial management software could cope with. The number of transactions was stretching the system's capabilities. Functionality to report and analyse individual cost centres was limited, leading to a heavy reliance on Microsoft Excel. Worse, the lack of integration to core business applications meant staff were continually re-keying or duplicating data across different systems.

Thatcher made up his mind that the software would have to be replaced, but with the world's economies on the verge of a global financial crisis, it was another two years before he could act.



At a glance

Business Objective

To streamline the finance function by automating processes, reducing unnecessary manual input and integrating the financial system with core business applications.

Solution

- Microsoft Dynamics GP

Business Benefits

- Timely production of accounts
- Greater reporting flexibility
- Reduction in the CFO's workload of one day per month

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The search for integration

In 2010, as soon as the property market began to show signs of improvement Thatcher prepared his list of "must have" attributes for a new financial system. First and foremost was the need for reporting flexibility including detailed cost centre reporting. Next came integration with GBCA's in-house developed CRM and back-office systems. Other requirements included reducing manual data entry, automation for processes such as fixed assets depreciation, bank reconciliation and BAS lodgements.

Thatcher researched the latest software trends then set up meetings with half a dozen different financial software organisations to learn more about their offerings. He also spoke extensively to peers to seek their thoughts and to hear of their experiences. In the end, he says, "Choosing Microsoft Dynamics GP was easy. When I looked at competitive products, the competitors' entry level was more expensive and yet the functionality was nowhere near as great as it was with Microsoft Dynamics GP. It had the most bang for your buck and it had the reputation."

To deploy the software, Thatcher turned to Professional Advantage. "I'd attended one of their breakfast seminars previously and a member of our audit committee had worked with Professional Advantage before. They had a very strong reputation, a presence in the major capital cities and from our meetings we felt comfortable with the Professional Advantage team. It felt like we couldn't really go wrong working with them," he says.

A question of resources

With the software and partner decisions locked in, Thatcher immediately sat down and spent the best part of two days going through the scoping document with Professional Advantage consultants. "They looked at how the organisation actually functions from a financial point of view and identified what I wanted to achieve," he says.

Thatcher had set a three month deadline for deployment and a go live date of 1 December. "The reason for this was it was our quietest part of the year both for me and for the organisation," he adds. The time frame was tight – particularly for Thatcher – but it was feasible. "Being a not for profit, resources are generally hard to come by. A lot of responsibility for the work that GBCA had to do fell back on to me and it all had to be done in conjunction with my day-to-day work," Thatcher notes. "It affected my workload but it wasn't as huge as I had thought it would be and it only went on for three or so weeks."

Shortly before the scheduled go live date, training of GBCA staff began. "This worked out really well because it meant that everything was still fresh in our minds when we switched over." Thatcher says. "Then, as far as the transition of data went, everything worked fine. We didn't have any problems and it all went brilliantly."

There were however some slight hiccups when Thatcher and his staff first began using the new software. The change from a simpler package to a more sophisticated fully featured solution invoked challenge. "It was a massive change-over for us," Thatcher admits. "It was fundamentally different and it took a few weeks to get used to it but now we are very happy with it and can see that it has improved our processing time."

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Benefits

Today, when members go to the GBCA website to book and pay for a course the data is entered into the CRM system before being automatically integrated directly into Microsoft Dynamics GP. "Previously we had to manually key all this in to the financial system. Essentially we were processing transactions twice. Now the integration has been achieved to a degree that is saving us hours and hours per week. It also substantially reduces the chance of error," Thatcher notes.

Speed of reporting has also increased thanks partly to a massive clean-up of the company's chart of accounts and also through the introduction of Microsoft's Frx reporting tool. "We're still getting used to how to change things and how to build certain reports. However, we're improving every single month. In terms of saving my time I'd say we have eliminated close to a day per month or more. Previously I had to get the figures out of the old software, put them into Excel and work with them to get them to balance. Now with the click of a button, it's all done for me automatically," Thatcher smiles.

"We've achieved what we set out to build which is a platform for growth."

As familiarity with the system grows Thatcher is starting to look at expanding with some of the software's more sophisticated functionality and add-ons, such as an integrated staff time sheeting and expense system developed by Professional Advantage.

"Now that we have a very powerful accounting system we can look to improve our reporting in other areas as well. We've achieved what we set out to build which is a platform for growth. We would need to increase our size exponentially before we grow out of the software," Thatcher concludes.

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