

UniLodge



At a Glance

UniLodge

UniLodge is a professional management company and the market leader in the operation and management of student accommodation in Australia and New Zealand.

Industry

Accommodation

Location

Queensland, Australia

Solution

Infor SunSystems

Function

Finance

Challenges

- Move from shared services to an independent financial system
- Customise the system to better suit the company's processes
- Maintain focus on the business during a period of exceptional growth

UniLodge bed down Infor SunSystems during time of change and growth with Professional Advantage

UniLodge provides furnished student accommodation and apartments in Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra, Brisbane, Adelaide, Auckland and Wellington. It pioneered the market for student accommodation management in 1996. Today, thanks to smart partnerships with educational institutions and an insistence on only dealing with properties in excellent locations, it leads the market with more than 9,000 beds under contracted management.

UniLodge is headquartered in Brisbane and employs around 250 staff, six of whom work in Finance.

The imperative for change

Until recently UniLodge operated in a shared services environment. Head office was co-located with two affiliated businesses and all three companies shared a number of common resources including an IT infrastructure. In late 2011 however, the companies decided to segregate.

For Eddie Barrett, Chief Financial Officer at UniLodge, the decision brought an immediate challenge – the need to quickly select, build and deploy a financial management software system. He chose Infor SunSystems for the task. It was the same software that the company had been using under the shared services arrangement.

“We didn’t look at any other systems in a huge amount of detail,” he admits. “We did enough research to make us aware of what was out there but we made the decision that we were happy with the base of what we already had. By desegregating we saw an opportunity to improve what we were doing with Infor SunSystems by introducing some value add initiatives and bolt-on applications.”



He also decided to stick with the company's existing IT solutions partner, Professional Advantage. "We were happy to stay with them.

“ Their products are reliable and their customer focus, the way they manage the relationship, is done well. Good relationship management is the most important thing. ”

"It makes a big difference, especially when we had such a short time to make a decision."

One change Barrett did insist upon however, was to have the software hosted, rather than on a company server. "We chose to do this for a combination of reasons: cost, ease and the way we resource our business. The nature of our company means we had servers all over the country. We decided to use this time to bring them into a consolidated, hosted environment so we can be more flexible in the way we roll out new businesses in the future."

A chance to improve

With the shared resources due to be cut off in early 2012, the Infor SunSystems implementation had to be swift and there was little margin for error. To complicate matters, the three month project couldn't have occurred at a busier time. UniLodge would have to juggle plans to move into a new office, establish its own services and deal with the accommodation demand that always precedes a new academic year. In addition, following a bumper 12 months, the company was in the process of putting on an additional 1,200 beds, many of which were due to become operational in the midst of the project.

"Physically, we moved to a different office during October and November," Barrett explains. "The whole server environment and IT moved at the same time. Only Finance continued to use the old server environment. This gave Professional Advantage time to develop the new system."

The implementation involved upgrading UniLodge to the most recent version of Infor SunSystems and deployment of three integrated, value add solutions – Bank Reconciliation, ePay and eRemit. All three were developed by Professional Advantage and bring greater automation to the Finance function.



As the deployment progressed, Professional Advantage created a test environment using UniLodge's backups, enabling the Finance team to explore and test the new setup. The freedom to completely customise the system to UniLodge's requirements led to new reports being developed and improvements introduced to existing reports.

“ We were using the existing platform to improve our functionality. Previously we were slightly restricted in what we could do because there were three companies involved. Now we could plot our own path. ”

When it was time to cut-over to the new, hosted system Barrett says, "It all went without a hitch. There were no reporting delays even though we have some very tight intra-month deadlines and quarterly reporting for stakeholders. We were able to honour all of those. It went so smoothly that no-one in the organisation realised what we actually did."

Time savings lead to more information faster

Barrett estimates that the Bank Reconciliation software is saving UniLodge at least three hours per day. On top of this, where monthly inter-company journaling used to take three quarters of a day, automation and refinements have reduced this to just ten minutes.



“It’s absolutely a big saving. The change in journaling gives us the ability to do this process more regularly, which in turn gives us the ability to look at data earlier. We can do snap P&Ls. We’re not always waiting for reporting at the end of the month.”

Over the next 6 to 12 months, Barrett plans to continue refining and automating the company’s new stand-alone processes. He mentions additional changes to reporting and longer term, the potential for a customer relationship management system (CRM).

“We see more growth on the horizon, so now is the time to iron out any changes to processes. The further we go down the track, the harder this will become. We’re doing an exercise now to identify where we need to focus our energies,” he says.

Looking back at the last 12 months, Barrett admits it was an extremely hectic time. “There were a lot of things going on but from my point of view, Professional Advantage simplified what was possibly the most important part of the breakaway. If we don’t have reliable financial data, it doesn’t matter what everyone else is doing. The whole project was done with no financial hiccups, Professional Advantage made it into a reasonably simple and straight-forward project. They delivered on absolutely what was agreed and they came in slightly under budget,” Barrett concludes.



About us

Professional Advantage is one of Australia’s most awarded solutions providers, with over 20 years experience in helping organisations improve their business systems through industry leading software solutions. Our 250-strong team in 6 offices across Australia and internationally has successfully worked with over 1000 organisations.

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