Project Online Becomes a Catalyst for Growth

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At a glance

Company Catalyst ONE

Industry Project Management Services

Location St. Leonards, NSW

Solution Project Online, Azure Apps, Power BI

Function Project Management, Operations

Key Points

- Catalyst ONE is a growing Australian project management services company that needed to optimise its operations and improve its financial and operational visibility. It relied heavily upon Excel spreadsheets and manual processes for managing projects which created risk and constrained their ability to grow.

- Timesheeting was one of the first operational activities to be transformed with Project Online and critical to enabling a smooth scaling of the Catalyst Business. Six months after the project commenced, Catalyst ONE was able to onboard one hundred employees overnight. The online timesheeting function ensured additional administrative headcount was avoided as timesheets no longer needed to be manually keyed into the payroll system.

- The Company has improved cash flow forecasting by enabling a better way to capture revenue with clear visibility into milestone billing across all projects.

- Catalyst ONE transformed from an organisation grappling with information management and operational insights to a data-driven business with comprehensive reports and dashboards visualising integrated data from Project Online, SharePoint and the bespoke Azure billing app to aid key business planning decisions.

The Company

Catalyst ONE is a growing Australian project management company that provides integrated project solutions and infrastructure services for the telecommunications industry with specialisation in on-site acquisition, property services, and telecommunication tower technical design, among other services. With five offices in Australia located in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth, it has been providing quality project management services to its customers since 2005.

Catalyst ONE was a small company that recognised it needed to optimise its project management operations to provide the business with better visibility on resource scheduling and project profitability. It relied heavily on an Excel-based project management process that lacked corporate rigour, limited operational insights and impacted its ability to scale.

"We didn't have the desired visibility as to what was going on day-to-day, the costs associated with the project or program. Even back when we had twenty-five people, we recognised we wanted to grow and doing everything by spreadsheets was never going to be the way to grow the business."

Anthony Osment, Managing Director

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The Need

Catalyst ONE needed a system to manage all their projects and resources in one central location. Their spreadsheet-driven project management process lacked the visibility they needed for a unified view of the incoming work, hours rendered or costs associated with the project.

Timesheets were manually keyed into their payroll system which was not only time-consuming but also prone to risk and errors. The extra load this placed on the finance team (who were not closely involved with daily project operations) made the process difficult and time consuming, and the team would not have been able to cope with the significant and immediate business growth that was soon to follow.

Being able to track the billing events—whether there's a purchase order or not, what has been invoiced or what is due to be invoiced—was difficult to do by just relying on Excel spreadsheets. It impacted Catalyst ONE's ability to forecast cash flow and revenue.

There was total reliance on project managers to process information for finance to invoice, and these were triggered manually via email to finance team. However this process posed a risk to the business as it allowed for possible miscommunication or invoicing to be lost in emails. Invoices not submitted on time then resulted in lost revenue or delayed cashflow.

The Solution

Selected for its demonstrated technical expertise in implementing leading-edge Microsoft-based solutions, Professional Advantage was chosen to deploy Microsoft Project Online and integrated cloud and collaboration services for Catalyst ONE.

Project Online is a subscription-based portfolio and project management (PPM) solution that combines resource management, scheduling, team collaboration, project analysis and reporting in an online Office 365 integrated tool. Because it is cloud-based, employees have anytime, anywhere access to project data using their preferred devices.

Professional Advantage helped Catalyst ONE in defining their requirements and configuring Project Online to suit their needs.

Because Project Online is delivered through Microsoft Office 365, it works seamlessly together with other Microsoft applications such as Microsoft Office, SharePoint and Power BI which Catalyst ONE was able to leverage in this project.

Having extensive knowledge of custom development, Professional Advantage developed a bespoke billing application running on Microsoft Azure and integrated it with Project Online to manage billing events, billing dates and forecast dates. This replaced the manual invoice triggers, tracking and approvals that would have otherwise been done through email which increased the risk of items falling through the cracks if not properly tracked.

"Now that we have the billing application, we're able to look at project profitability and forecast our business confidently. That's something we couldn't do easily in the past."

Garry Sandilands, Telecommunications Consultant & Contractor

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Results

A year after implementing Project Online, Catalyst ONE has experienced significant wins and improvements in its project management operations.

COST SAVINGS AND GREATER PRODUCTIVITY

Without the Project Online solution in place, Catalyst ONE would have needed to hire more people to manually key timesheets into their payroll system for the hundred staff that joined in the same week in 2017, only six months after the project commenced. Implementing Project Online allowed for a company-wide, streamlined timesheeting capability that allowed Catalyst to save on additional headcount. The smoother operations and intelligent reporting also permitted project managers to focus on their core function dedicating more time and attention to their assigned projects.

Because Project Online is cloud-based, Catalyst ONE saves on infrastructure and maintenance costs, will always stay current, has built-in disaster recovery, and has guaranteed SLA's from Microsoft.

IMPROVED CASH FLOW MANAGEMENT

Project Online, together with the bespoke Azure billing app, enables the business to have clear milestone visibility across all projects ensuring they are invoiced on time. Project managers are now able to easily keep track of purchase orders coming in, and what has or has not been invoiced.

Catalyst ONE has immensely benefited in areas including capturing revenue information, cash flow forecasting, being able to track its projects' progress, and find ways to narrow the gaps. They can now easily identify small things that restrain projects being closed off and as a result can take necessary action to turn it into cash and efficiencies for the business.

"Our business was enabled to overnight bring in a hundred people online on the first day they started with us, and that was through the timesheeting capability of Project Online. This alone was a huge win for us."

Garry Sandilands,
Telecommunications Consultant

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FROM GRAPPLING WITH INFORMATION TO A DATA-DRIVEN ORGANISATION

Catalyst ONE quickly transformed into a data-driven organisation with data visualisation and dashboards provided by Power BI that link together project data from Project Online, SharePoint and the Azure billing app. These executive dashboards allowed for rapid action and decisions on business and project performance that couldn't be done with spreadsheets.

True to its self-service BI capability and together with its easy to use and familiar user interface, the project teams at Catalyst ONE were able to create sophisticated project reports from Power BI even without formal training. Within several months there were almost thirty comprehensive reports that Catalyst ONE had created to aid business critical decision making.

NEXT STEPS

Migrating the larger existing active projects to Project Online wasn't considered feasible by the business. As a result project scheduling and resource management functions in Project Online will grow and provide further benefit progressively as projects managed under legacy systems cease and all active projects are transitioned into the new system. The Company also envisions utilising Power BI much further to provide even greater visibility on project profitability. Project Online will continue to become a catalyst for growth at Catalyst ONE, providing for its needs long into the future.

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About Professional Advantage

Professional Advantage is one of Australia's most awarded solution providers, with over 25 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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