Case Study

Analyst for Sage mirrors OCS' 'single point of access' message and delivers comprehensive reporting system for business and financial managers.

"Analyst is enabling the rapid delivery of transparent, standard financial reports across all areas of our diverse business."

Jenny Sener, Head of ICT at OCS Group Ltd

Background

OCS Group Ltd., is a leading supplier of property services to a wide range of UK blue chip companies. These services include hygiene, cleaning, catering, security, laundries, transport and technical services. OCS is rapidly increasing its service portfolio to become a one stop shop, allowing customers to subscribe to a variety of property support services.

OCS is a privately owned family business, with an annual turnover in excess of £400M. The company has grown through acquisitions in the property services sector in the UK and abroad. The Group owns several companies in the UK and abroad employing over 45,000 people.

Reorganisation

A branding exercise transformed the many separate brand identities within the OCS Group to a consolidated OCS brand, focused on providing a range of property services to customers through a single point of access. This strategy led to the implementation of an IT infrastructure to support the company's new business direction.

OCS Ltd. reorganized into seven business units that represent each of its core services. Several layers reflect the company's reporting hierarchy. Business units segment geographically (divisions), into areas (regions), by OCS offices (branches), with customers

(sites) that subscribe to OCS services (services). This highlighted the need for cost centre reporting across all dimensions of the Group.

A joint Finance and IT initiative, 'Project Musketeer' was set up to manage the transition of an inherited mix of back office systems to a suite that mapped the requirements of the new OCS Group Ltd. The Project Manager for Project Musketeer is Steve Sutton, who is assisted by Craig Cattigan in a technical consulting role.

Reporting Requirement

OCS Group Ltd. required a management reporting system to allow it to measure Profit & Loss by business unit, division, region and branch. They also wanted a standard chart of accounts which met the company's new structure and which allowed visibility of the accounts to a very detailed level.

Craig Cattigan managed the Reporting project which was closely linked to the Cost Centre Management workstream of Project Musketeer. The supplier of OCS' Sage Enterprise Finance system, was invited in to evaluate and recommend a way forward.

It was suggested that OCS' complex organisational hierarchies could be reflected in the use of Sage Enterprise (Line 500) Project Ledger being used as an extension of the Nominal Ledger. Reporting was a major issue and Analyst for Sage was recommended.

OCS reviewed reporting tools including Crystal, Cognos and Business Objects. It was Analyst's powerful data connectivity to the Sage ledgers and its unique ability to report financial data direct to Excel

that exactly met the specifications of OCS Group and its businesses that governed the choice of Analyst.

Solution

A technical workshop between OCS, AFL and supplier scoped out the data relationships and requirements and two weeks later AFL delivered a finished application for the OCS Strand business unit. "It was proof that Analyst does what the sales people say it does!" exclaimed Craig Cattigan, "It is pretty much an out of the box management reporting application that you simply point at your data."

The standard report pack presents a high level common picture to all but it is the powerful drill down capability that is most highly valued by managers. Each business unit has its own set of key indicators and drill down provides a spontaneous customised reporting mechanism and allows key figures to be scrutinized selectively. For example, a detailed analysis of food costs is a requirement specific to the catering business. Cattigan says, "This degree of flexibility enables each business unit to interrogate the critical aspects of their business." He continues, "Analyst has given OCS greater visibility of its accounts across the company at month end."

Analyst is refreshed with data from the ledger every 15 minutes. At month end, finance managers submit journals and run and review the reports immediately. This combined with Analyst's strong report distribution capability enables OCS to send out a snapshot of the accounts for review prior to month end. Managers can comment on the figures and preempt queries on the draft figures prior to finalisation. "Analyst is helping finance deliver a more accurate published report pack," enthuses Cattigan.

Working with Analyst

Although Analyst was purchased as a financial reporting tool within Project Musketeer, increasingly the finance users are writing their own customized reports. "Analyst provides a safe environment for users," comments Cattigan in reference to the fact that data cannot be overwritten or corrupted because it is refreshed direct from the ledgers. "And with little training the report author tool is easy to use," he adds.

People with Author training can take a P&L report and turn it into a trend report or rolling forecast or budget entry sheet with a few clicks. Drill down means IT is no longer asked to write quirky one off reports because users can write their own.

Craig Cattigan was ambitious beyond report writing and wanted to acquire the skills to roll out Analyst applications to the remaining business units. "The speed at which the first application went in inspired us to take additional training in Analyst's data connectivity and data management tools," remarks Cattigan. He subsequently completed Analyst implementations for Head Office, OCS Ireland and OCS Cleaning, the biggest of the OCS business units. "We have been able to automatically deliver comprehensive management accounts, which we are continuing to roll out across all OCS Group companies," adds Steve Sutton.

As with all new systems there were some initial teething problems. Cattigan revealed, "There were issues with the data relationships we had built between data in the Project and Nominal ledgers and these became evident when users received their reports showing incorrect values." Since Analyst is both the data delivery mechanism and the report generator, Cattigan continued to clarify, "Analyst helped IT identify the underlying problems but this meant users didn't get the correct reports until we got to the root and fixed it." The problems were resolved and Analyst has proven to be a benefit to IT and end users alike.

What's Next?

"We have found Analyst to be a very stable and robust product," summarises Cattigan. He continues, "It runs and churns out reports with little intervention."

Once the reporting project is complete there is the opportunity to take cost centre reporting beyond branch level and down to site and service level. Cattigan foresees further Analyst projects for Group budgeting and Group consolidation. The same data feeds, reporting database, financial intelligence and report writing will allow OCS IT to offer its users an integrated financial reporting system. "This is a huge advantage for our finance and business users," concludes Cattigan.