

Customer case studies

Parasol

Formally launched in 2000, Parasol has helped some 35,000 contractors and freelancers maximise their income while minimising the hassles of self-employment. Today, the popular outsourced employment solutions company maintains partnerships with 2,500 recruiting agencies and continues to expand into new market sectors.

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Jon Cook,
Systems Analyst



The journey

When Jon Cook joined Parasol as a contractor in 2005, his sole purpose was to investigate solutions to replace the company’s back end system. Parasol was using a bespoke in-house system coupled with Sage Line 50 and Access Payroll to handle invoicing, cash matching, debtor management, contract management and CRM.

“We were looking to grow our customers, but keep a tight rein on our back end office headcount,” says Jon. “The key to do this is to utilise smart solutions that provide a high level of automation.”

With this in mind, Jon, along with the managing director, financial controller and IT manager, formed project team ‘New World’. The group was determined to find the best

‘fit for purpose’ off-the-shelf packages that could blend to provide a complete solution.

The discovery

Time was the critical factor in the purchase. Parasol wanted a new system implemented in time for the 2006 tax Year End to aid a clean migration of data. “To move the date would have added an extra level of complexity that we seriously wanted to avoid,” says Jon.

Other key issues were flexibility and integrating with the in-house website. “The supplier had to deliver an integrated end-to-end solution within a relatively tight budget,” says Jon.

As an existing Access Payroll user, it was natural for Parasol to consider what Access had to offer.

Industry Outsourced employment solutions

Geographic Warrington, Poole and London

Employees 143 internal staff plus 8,294 consultants

Turnover £338m

Solution Access Dimensions
GoldMine Premium Edition
SelectPay
SelectHR

Modules Core Ledgers
Corrections
Credit Control
Asset Manager
Invoice Register
POP
Costing/Project Management
Microsoft Office Integration
SOP & Invoicing
SDK
Import Utility
Access TaskCentre

The project team arranged a site visit with their local Access consultant to see the software in operation. This gave confidence to the financial controller and managing director.

“Ultimately, we were won over by the enthusiasm shown, and the demonstration that Access could deliver a solution that met our needs within our timescale and budget,” says Jon.

The solution

Following the site visit, Access recommended GoldMine CRM Premium Edition to capture consultants’ (registered users) details and to manage agency and sales relationships. Information collected in GoldMine and timesheets pulled from Parasol’s website are transferred into Access Dimensions for invoicing.

To best support the company’s evolving needs, Access suggested upgrading from Access Payroll to SelectPay, a SQL-based version of the product that would provide great scalability and flexibility. SelectPay provides a seamless link to Access Dimensions for faster processing.

To support the solution, the consultant proposed Access TaskCentre to give more flexibility with reporting automation, and Crystal reports for a wide range of reporting and KPI analysis.

The implementation

The project had an ambitious timeline with just four months before going live. Jon says Access assigned a great deal of resources to deliver the project on time. “Access brought in GoldMine experts as well as developers so that they could get a grasp of our necessary customisations,” he comments. “This ensured we could begin development quite quickly instead of spending a huge amount of time talking and writing specifications.”

The April 2006 deadline was met, but the go-live highlighted some issues during the initial payrolls.

“To Access’ credit, they worked with us tirelessly to resolve them,” says Jon. “In hindsight, the tight deadline had caused pressure on the planning, development and testing cycles.”

The results

Parasol gained benefits almost immediately. “The double handling of data was gone, and the integration meant that we had faster processing times,” says Jon. Parasol has seen long-term benefits such as:

Automated payroll

Parasol guarantees its consultants quick turnaround on payments and SelectPay helps make that happen. “The bit I’m most impressed with and am proud to have delivered is the payroll automation,” says Jon. “It’s scheduled to run automatically at 07:30, so our payroll team can come into work in the morning, and the system has already brought the first run for them to reconcile before transmitting. This can quite easily be over £1m worth of gross pay.”

SelectPay is scalable between 10 to thousands of employees, making it an ideal solution for Parasol – which processes payroll for over 8,200 flexible employees. “On average, we do 4,000 individual payroll calculations per week from the imported data,” says Jon. “SelectPay runs four times a day, and in one swoop, it processes weekly and monthly people by three different payment methods – without interaction from payroll staff!”

Improved efficiency

The powerful automation allowed Parasol to control office head count while growing the business. “Since the system went live in 2006, we’ve constantly been improving it and making changes,” says Jon. “These have led to a reduction in head count required to manage our consultants, better cash and debtor management, cost savings through automation and faster reporting.”

Reduced admin

SelectHR is the latest addition to Parasol’s solution. The company was working off multiple spreadsheets for its HR processes but wanted better management reporting of absence and head count. Implementing the web-based SelectHR has taken the admin burden off the management and HR teams. “SelectHR allows for faster and more accurate reporting,” he comments.

Post implementation

With its bespoke end-to-end solution in place, Parasol continues to make the most of the software’s features and functionality through additional consultancy from Access.

“Within an organisation, if you just have your own people giving internal training when they are leaving or changing roles, then this can lead to a diluted knowledge pool,” says Jon. “We’ve found it beneficial to take additional training just to ensure our people have a full and rounded knowledge on all aspects of the system that they use.”

The future

Parasol is already working to go-live with the link between SelectHR and SelectPay for internal employees so staff can access their payslips online and update their names and addresses, and line managers can send new starter information to HR. The company is interested in testing Access’ Dashboard and Document Management solutions, and long term plans may include upgrading to the latest version of GoldMine.

Conclusion

Jon concludes, “Parasol and Access have an excellent relationship, which has helped to deliver a fantastic bespoke end-to-end solution. Access has always been able to take our thoughts and ideas to deliver innovative solutions that reach and surpass the users’ expectations.”

Further information

For further information on this, or any other Access case studies, please telephone us on 01206 322 575, email case-studies@theaccessgroup.com or, alternatively, visit www.theaccessgroup.com/downloads/case-studies.aspx