

Customer case studies

NMSI

Incorporating the Science Museum, the National Museum for Photography, Film and Television and the National Railway Museum, NMSI needed a system capable of handling complex requirements, the result of operating as two different legal entities – NMSI, a charitable organisation and NMSI Trading Company, a commercial entity.

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Paul Flewelling
Senior Management Accountant



As a government organisation, the Museums needed to follow a rigorous selection procedure. Firstly, a tender was issued, containing a very detailed statement of requirements. Out of the nine responses received, three packages were short listed, including Access Dimensions. These were evaluated on their ability to meet both essential and desirable requirements, and on cost. Many presentations were made in support of each bid and reference sites were visited.

The reason for choosing Dimensions was clear. It met all of the Museum's essential requirements, plus many of the desirable ones; and it cost significantly less than the other two candidates. Another deciding factor was the user friendliness of the Access system, as Paul Flewelling, Senior Management Accountant, explains “We involved our users in the selection process. Everyone was

struck by the strong impact of the Dimensions screens. We received positive feedback immediately. It was unanimously agreed that Dimensions was not only more user friendly than the existing accounting system, but also than the other systems being evaluated.”

Securing information

Detailed security profiles for 500 user identities guarantee a secure environment for holding information, by strictly governing which parts of the system can be used by which members of staff. Sales ledger clerks have access to the sales ledger; likewise purchase ledger access has been given to purchase ledger clerks. Wider permissions are granted as necessary for other members of the organisation, such as the management or financial accounts team members.

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| Industry | Not for Profit |
| Geographic | London |
| Employees | 1,000 |
| Turnover | £62m |
| Solution | Access Dimensions |
| Modules | Core ledgers SOP & Invoicing POP Costing/project mgmt Access Cashflow Credit Control Invoice Register SDK Transaction Broker Import Utility Corrections Orbis |

Non-finance users also have access to the system. They can raise their own purchase orders and sales orders, eliminating delays and reducing the workload on the finance team. In addition, they can draw off their own reports when required. This is of particular importance when monitoring the financial performance of individual cost centres or projects.

Cost accounting for a diverse range of projects

With the Museum undertaking a large number and wide variety of projects, the flexibility of the Access costing module has been a major gain for Paul and his teams. This can be illustrated by looking at three very different projects.

The first is the construction of a new Railway Museum at Shildon, a £10M project that is being undertaken in conjunction with the local authority.

The Access system is set up to consolidate all costs against one major project record. Up to 30 sub-projects, each with their own records, feed information into this top level (where sort keys are used to reflect the sub-project codes).

This structure enables Paul to conduct sophisticated cost reporting. He says, "The main advantage is the ease in which accurate costing reports can be produced. Now we can quickly identify our actuals versus budgeted. Non-financial managers, many of whom frequently need project information, can also run reports at any time and get all the information they need."

The second example is the 'Science Nights' project. Periodically, the Science Museum opens its doors at night, for children to sleep over. The costing module is used to monitor the income raised at such events and to allocate specific costs against them.

Finally, the Museum also conducts activities that depend heavily upon sponsorship. For example, charitable donations are currently being used to fund upgrades to the museum's galleries. The costing module tracks the expenditure made against these donations – something that is essential when dealing with restricted funding.

Tightening purchasing controls

Across all of the museums operations, around 3,600 purchase orders are raised each month. The Access Purchase Order Processing and Invoice Register modules have made a significant impact on the Museum's purchasing culture. Prior to Access, all purchasing was done manually. Paul explains, "In the past, the majority of orders were only put onto the system once the invoice had been received. Now orders are raised at the time of purchasing. This has immediately tightened our purchasing controls."

The Invoice Register module is helping to tighten these controls even further, by clarifying which invoices relate to which purchase orders, and highlighting orders that have yet to be fulfilled.

"Invoice Register helps us to control invoices in a proper manner," says Paul. "This has streamlined processing work for our purchase ledger clerks, as we are no longer backtracking or making late adjustments. As we expand our use of the system we will also take advantage of the authorisation and approval procedures. We are certainly hopeful that this will further reduce our costs."

Eliminating mundane tasks

At NMSI, sales orders are raised for a wide range of reasons - corporate hire activities through the commercial operation, educational programs for schools, and for the collection of sponsorship money from corporate

donors. Inevitably, this means a number of different departments are involved in the process.

The old system required each department to fill in a "sales invoice requisition" form. This was forwarded to the Sales Ledger department for the invoice to be raised. Now, with Access Sales Order Processing, each department goes directly into the accounts system to raise its own sales orders (and insert its own comments). Paul says, "Because of this module, the Sales Ledger department no longer needs to key in details held on hand-written forms. This has reduced errors, increased our efficiency and given ledger staff more time to concentrate on other tasks."

Improving credit control

With the Access Credit Control module, NMSI now has consolidated credit and debt control. "With an integrated system we can choose how we organise our credit control activities," explains Paul. "We can chase total debt from the centre or from individual locations. Chase letters can be raised quickly, without having to re-key any account information. Before Access we had three separate sales ledgers, making our operations fragmented and disorganised. The same customer could be chased by different sites without the others even knowing it."

Having just implemented credit control, the essentials are up, running and working effectively. NMSI is now working on developing routines that make the most of the facilities offered by Dimensions.

Meeting government requirements

Careful design of the chart of accounts and use of user defined keys, along with a variety of crystal reports, enable the NMSI to produce statutory accounts which meet government, charity and company accounting requirements.

Further information

For further information on this, or any other Access case studies, please telephone us on 01206 322575, email case-studies@theaccessgroup.com or, alternatively, visit www.theaccessgroup.com/downloads/case-studies.aspx