CASE STUDY

CLIENT:	Eastern Plant Hire
INDUSTRY:	Building and Construction
LOCATION:	Australia
PRODUCT SUITE:	EXO Business
MYOB ENTERPRISE PARTNER:	Acacia Consulting Services

Victorian business finds a system that handles the idiosyncrasies of plant hire – and saves them time in the process.

Overview

Founded in 1998, Nunawading-based Eastern Plant Hire (EPH) is one of Victoria's largest plant hire businesses. A recognised brand across the state, the company provides a wide range of earth moving equipment to building and civil construction jobs large and small.

Trading under the banner 'The best service on earth', EPH is committed to continuous improvement. But with over 1200 contractors and a fleet numbering 2000-plus trucks and equipment, maintaining consistency of service across such a vast operation requires the highest visibility on business processes. And that depends on having the right software.

Time to change

It took EPH about six months to choose a new system. They looked at several possibilities, but ended up focusing on EXO – largely at the recommendation of their external accountants.

EXO stood out for two reasons in particular, according to Ellis: its reporting capabilities – specifically for invoice financing – and its ability to flex and change as the business grew.

EXO was also better suited to the idiosyncrasies of plant and equipment hire brokerage, in particular back-to-back invoicing.

Because of the nature of hire agreements, EPH needs to raise two invoices for every transaction – one for the supplier, the other for the customer. EXO handles this by automatically generating supplier invoices for every customer invoice that is manually entered, reducing the data entry effort considerably in the process.

As well as functionality, price played a big part in the decision too, adds Ellis.

"Our directors are very price conscious."

Cementing the decision to go with EXO

EXO implementation partner Acacia was given the task of tailoring the system to EPH's precise needs.

"Based in Balwyn [in Melbourne's eastern suburbs], they were the closest EXO specialist to us," says Ellis, "but they were much more than just the local IT company. Acacia were absolutely instrumental in cementing our decision to go with EXO.

"Their demonstration showed us the product was right for our business. They also made it clear they could customise EXO where we needed specific functionality over and above the standard package – which was critical".

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The beauty of SQL

Acacia has tailored EXO quite extensively for EPH.

They have written reports to keep track of contractors' public liability insurance, and created debt collection letters that can be issued automatically to debtors when credit limits are breached.

More recently, EPH (with Acacia's assistance) added AutoDoc – a system that controls the automation of document printing and emailing and helps to reduce the consumption of letterhead paper.

"To ensure the forms contained the right information, such as email addresses, we used the report writer Clarity," says Acacia's Dianne Semmens.

"What makes EXO so useful is its stored procedures, and the ability to trigger those procedures using SQL," she adds.

Because EXO uses SQL (the industry standard database language), the system can be scaled up or extended. And with a built in report writer and modifiable menus, additional reports can be prepared and added seamlessly.

"Even additional non-standard data can be integrated into the database, thanks to EXO's native support for extra database fields," adds Semmens.

Living with the system day to day

"We've had EXO installed a while now," says Ellis, "and staff are happy using it.

"There was the odd teething problem in the early days, but most of these were sorted out with a little extra onsite training from Acacia.

"On a day to day basis, EXO has certainly improved management visibility," he continues.

"It's not just the custom-built reports. The basic profit and loss and balance sheet reports give us good visibility on what's going on in the business, and we're fairly comfortable generating and modifying those as needed. We still export some reports to Excel for graphing and presentation purposes, and the support within EXO allows us to do this."

EXO's biggest plus

Reviewing EXO as a whole, Ellis says some features really stand out.

For finance and audit purposes, being able to lock prior periods is really useful. So too is the ability to link the generation of a customer invoice and the subsequent payment of a subcontractor.

"We were able to customize EXO to do this in a single step rather than as two separate entries," says Ellis, "which – when you're processing over 5,000 subcontractor dockets a month – is a significant time saver.

"And that, really, is EXO's biggest plus – at least for us."

"The ability to customise is great. It means the system is flexible and capable of growing as we do. But the benefit we notice most, on a day to day basis, is that it saves us time."

Client and Enterprise partner details

www.easterplanthire.com

www.acaciacons.com.au