CASE STUDY

CLIENT:	Midland Irrigation
INDUSTRY:	Agriculture
LOCATION:	Australia
PRODUCT SUITE:	EXO Business
MYOB ENTERPRISE PARTNER:	Exoserv

Victorian irrigation business tracks health of its branches in real time.

Overview

Midland Irrigation is one of Victoria's largest pumping, turf watering and irrigation outfits. Started in Bendigo in 1973, it's the oldest too – with a reputation for developing simple and efficient water management systems in even the toughest climates.

By the late 1990s, Graham Smith and his family had built the company into a highly successful all-round irrigation business, offering procurement, supply, design, installation service and maintenance. And in 1999, they added a second branch branch in Ballarat.

Looking for the right balance

At the time, Midland Irrigation had been using an old DOS based system for their accounting. A system that was, according to general manager Matt Smith, very good once upon a time – but starting to show its age in comparison with more modern products.

"Aside from the fact that we knew we weren't going to get much more support out of it," says Smith, "we needed to control two branches from a single system – and it wouldn't let us do that.

Over the best part of 18 months, Midland Irrigation looked at various replacements – including the modern version of their DOS-based system. But each time felt what was on offer was either too expensive, or too limited.They were on the verge of giving up when somebody suggested looking at MYOB's EXO for Business.

"We took a look," says Smith, "and EXO seemed like a good choice on paper – for the right sort of price.

After a few initial discussions, MYOB put us in touch with local EXO-specialists Exoserv. It was then that we knew we were on to a winner".

"It was important to us that the people selling and supporting the product were believers in it too," stresses Smith, "and Exoserv's dedication was apparent from the word go".

Preparing for change one step at a time

Exoserv, a systems integrator with offices in Melbourne and Bendigo, set to work tailoring EXO to Midland Irrigation's specific requirements.

What the irrigation business was looking for, in a nutshell, was an integrated solution incorporating point-of-sale (POS), job costing, stock control and back office financials. And they wanted it live across two locations 200 kms apart.

"We sat down with Exoserv, talked through our requirements and looked at areas where modifications would need to be made," says Smith.

A lot of work went into stock management in particular, according to Exoserv's Hamish Marshall.

Alongside the tweaking and tailoring, Exoserv put a trial version of EXO in place, which allowed staff to get to grips with the system before it went live.

MYOB ENTERPRISE SOLUTIONS

When it came to switching over, there were no major dramas – something that Smith attributes in part to Exoserv's expertise and thoroughness. However he admits it helps when your own IT staff are keen to get a new system up and running.

Marshall agrees.

"Matt's local IT guys really made things easier for us," he says.

With the system fully installed, there was very little resistance to the new way of working, according to Smith – apart the odd mutter, which was soon addressed with a little extra training.

"Now there is no way anyone would go back."

Seeing clearly now

Two years on, Smith says EXO has improved managerial visibility immeasurably.

"We can now see at a glance how we are tracking financially with regard to retail sales. The job cost program gives us much more control over where things are and how we price our work too.

"And with a really efficient POS interface and purchase order system, we can see what stock is being ordered and whether jobs are progressing. Which means we can not only track the health of the business more accurately, but forecast and budget with more confidence," says Smith.

According to Marshall, the branches function was a real success.

"Previously, Midland had separate databases for each branch, which required internal consolidation of accounts. What EXO allows them to do is still report on each location's debtors, transactions, banking, stock and profitability independently, but do it all from one database. And that saves a lot of time and effort."

Flexibility and future functionality

Aside from being able to run data across two stores

simultaneously, probably the biggest difference between EXO and Midland Irrigation's old DOS system is the reporting.

"EXO's reporting capabilities are so much better it's not funny," says Smith.

"The dashboard feature is fantastic. It allows us to see anything that's going on in the business – right down to the number of transactions we do in a day."

Other little tweaks to the system mean that Midland Irrigation can now see in an instant how each sales rep is performing – and can even be alerted if margins get too low, either by rep or by branch.

"Being able to dip into any aspect of the business at any point has made everything much more transparent. It's made our staff more accountable to their actions too," says Smith, "and that's really improved productivity and attention to detail".

EXO's customisability means that whenever Midland Irrigation need a new report, they only have to put in a request to Exoserv and additional functionality can be written into the system.

"We've made some modifications both on the purchasing side, and in accounting – and in some instances, the new report has even been ready the same day."

According to Smith, it's this flexibility that really shines through with EXO.

"For the moment, we're running the two stores and it's great to be able to share data across them. But if we decide to open a third or fourth in the future, we know that EXO can cope with that, and grow as we do."

"That," he says, "is worth its weight in gold".

Client and Enterprise partner details

www.midlandirrigation.com.au

www.exoserv.com.au