



AFL power club improves off-field with EXO

Overview

Established in 1991, Adelaide Football Club – nicknamed the Crows – has one of the largest membership bases in the AFL. In 2009 it had revenues of around \$25 million, but like many sporting based organisations, much of that came from an inventory that's fixed.

Finding new revenue streams is an ongoing challenge for the club. So too, is controlling escalating expenses. Staying on top of both is dependent on excellent internal visibility and a seamless flow of data – something that, until recently, the Crows didn't have.

Problem

The two-headed monster

When Steven Honkoop joined the Crows as IT Manager, one of the first things he noticed was just how many manual processes there were at the club. "The trouble with manual processes," he says, "is they go hand in hand with duplication. It's like having a two headed monster attacking your efficiency".

The cause of all this manual work was the Crows' incumbent business management system. It was cumbersome, there was no fluent or consistent GUI, and it was near impossible to customise. Because of an open database connection, backend security was an issue too. Clearly something had to be done.

Replace or repair?

"At a pinch, we could have tried to improve our existing system," says Honkoop, "but not without major modifications and substantial R&D input." Even at its most basic, a new system would introduce several fundamental business process improvements – like purchase orders and simplified retail reconciliation. So replacing rather than repairing really was the only option.

"But to find the best match," Honkoop adds, "we first had to determine what our goals were. Obviously, we were looking for things like reliability, scalability, continuity or interoperability. In most modern systems though, those are really a given. It's the overall organisational goals that really give you an opportunity to get a bit more business centric and engage all departments."

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Solution

Weighing up the contestants

Out of several systems they looked at, the short list came down to three: Great Plains, Finance One and the eventual choice – MYOB EXO. According to Honkoop, there were several good reasons for this decision. Top of the list was EXO's integrated functionality, which gave the Crows accounting and finance, point of sale (for the 'Crow Mania' retail outlets) and employee services in a single system.

Another big attraction with EXO was its SQL database. "We knew SQL would give us the flexibility we so lacked. It meant we could improve our internal workflows with software that was developed specific to our unique requirements," says Honkoop. Underpinning all of this was MYOB's reputation. "MYOB is a sizeable player and resourced well," says the IT manager, "so we knew that statutory obligations would always be met." Price was also a factor, though not the key driver.

That, according to Honkoop, was 'value'. "We could have bought more expensive systems and had them integrated by 'big end' players. But the comparative value proposition just wasn't there."

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Other important influences

Value aside, one other major factor in the Crows' decision to choose EXO was the influence of Commercial IT – the eventual systems integrator. "Knowing you can rely on the knowledge and support of a company like Commercial IT really makes a difference when it comes to committing to a large system like EXO," says Honkoop. "It means you go into the whole process confident your needs are going to be properly met."

"Commercial IT were obviously well practiced in EXO," he continues, "but more than that, they weren't afraid to flag areas where we could make improvements in our business practices to take advantage of EXO features and create efficiencies. We felt, and still feel, like they are our partner rather than just a provider."

Easing in change

A key product of the partnership was the education plan the Crows and Commercial IT put together. "You can't simply force a new system on your staff," says Honkoop – "if it doesn't get the buy-in of the people using it, you're never going to create value". A firm commitment to training, most staff at the Crows picked up EXO extremely well. "We certainly didn't show any deficiency in any financial function during the change over period."

More than just a product – it's a process

With the new system now properly bedded in, Honkoop says "it's immediately obvious that EXO is more about what we can do than what we cannot. We knew that a new system would introduce simple business process improvements. Retail reconciliation, for example, now takes us 20 minutes – where it used to take half a day or more."

"That's a real and measurable efficiency gain," says Honkoop. "But over and above that, what EXO really gives us is the possibility to introduce new features as and when we need them. It's a kind of confidence that we're not going to come up against a brick wall, like we did with our incumbent system."

"At the end of the day," he sums up, "it's not just a product – it is an entire process: the resources, the company that develops and improves the product, the strength of the channel that supports it, the relationship and trust you have with the company that implements it – and not least, the people that use and enjoy it. When all that comes together properly, you have a really useful business management tool at your disposal."

"It's not just a product – it is an entire process."



Outcome

Before

- > Lots of manual processes, duplication of efforts and inefficiencies
- > Unable to customise current software, no fluent or consistent GUI and back-end security was also an issue.

After

- > Simplified business process and retail reconciliation improvements
- > Flexibility to introduce new features when required
- > Strong support channel to call upon when needed
- > A Business Management System that is reliable, scalable and efficient.

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