

Case Study - First Scottish Searching Services (FSSS)

So how do you rescue a busy company and make it more than twelve times as efficient?

INTO THE BREACH... THE STORM BEFORE THE CALM.

Nobody would mind us describing the very active environment we entered at FSSS as fragmented! First Scottish is one of the busiest search-service providers to the legal profession in Scotland, so things like accuracy and speed of turnaround are critical; and mistakes costly. Continued steady growth year on year meant the business became a victim of its own success. As regards technology, we arrived to Linux, Netscape, Windows 3.11, NT, a Token Ring network and several disparate databases unable to communicate with each other.

The limitations of the IT systems meant that the only way to cope with the expansion was to throw in more people and this was having a serious effect on efficiency. Office space was also increasingly cramped and hectic, with staff having to negotiate over-sized printers and other hardware to squeeze back to their 'posts'. We're not finger-pointing or judging here - these situations are actually commonplace - we're just painting a realistic picture. It was clear something significant had to be done, but it's a bold and brave decision - and who do you ask?

THE CHALLENGE: SO, WHAT ARE WE DEALING WITH HERE?

Essentially, the FSSS IT systems themselves did not 'talk' to each other. They operated independently and this resulted in complex, labour-intensive processes. The company was forced to rely on manual control by an increasingly pressurised Management and staff.

Before our involvement in the project, performing a search service involved the following steps:

STEP ONE

- Receiving a phone call, e-mail or fax instruction
- Entering these details on the system (running Windows 3.11!)

STEP TWO

- Printing out the request
- Physically placing them in different coloured folders
- Manually distributing these between departments

STEP THREE - The actual searches

At this point, searches would begin. However, they were run via at least three disparate systems (Access, Linux, Web). This was a very slow process, and information painful to collate.

STEP FOUR - The typing pool

The output information results were finally printed, collated and passed to a large pool of typists to be physically produced! Once typed, they would then e-mail, fax or post every result - and we're talking masses of searches!

OTHER FACTORS

Unsurprisingly, with these systems, sudden surges in demand were difficult to accommodate. Typically 50% of the business in any one month would come in the last week and even with 100 staff this meant a lot of expensive overtime. The culture had become stressful for everyone to ensure clients' needs were met. Yes, something certainly had to be done...

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CAN THIS BE DONE?

As you'd probably guess, the whole environment needed tearing out and replacing. This was a ground-up rethink of how an entire complex operation works, and how it could work far better.

FSSS simply needed the tools for the job it was doing, but as quickly as possible and with minimal disruption; no small request. This was a system that could be salvaged, making it possible to get a fantastic business back at the top of its game. And we knew we were the ones to do it.

Over the months that followed, we went to work with a passion! This involved long hours on-site and the type of Requirements Capture and Scoping that makes your eyes water. We had to be sure what we brought would not just deliver and work well, but actually produce massive, measurable increases in efficiency and workflow. Dynamics NAV was the answer.

A TURNAROUND TO END ALL TURNAROUNDS

By now, we're like members of the FSSS family. This was handy, as our own families were seeing less and less of us as the project neared completion! But complete it we did. On time and on budget.

“Comparing the new system to our previous system(s) is like comparing night & day, although thankfully the new system means no longer working through the night!”

Malcolm Noble - Director of Searching

The system is now a powerful and efficient machine. Here's how it works today;

STEP ONE

Instructions come via eMail/web and are automatically assigned to team work queues. High priority searches are automatically coded and flagged to teamleaders

STEP TWO

All products, services and options are pre-set-up with point and click menu-interface at users workstations.

STEP THREE

Appropriate teams receive time-stamped details in sequence, accepting them at each stage, carrying out their searches and adding their work to the output document. Once the user hits Complete, the search is automatically assigned to the next team.

STEP FOUR

After the final search is completed the system generates bookmarked PDFs of the reports and automatically emails or faxes it to the client. At the same time invoices are automatically generated.

All the searches are now handled within Dynamics NAV, thus creating almost a paperless office, workflow is controlled and performance is monitored. Costs are down and efficiency has increased by 60%.

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TWELVE TIMES MORE EFFICIENT

You may think that's an odd sort of number to measure it by, so perhaps it is best explained like this. With the old system, one particular department could produce one hundred searches per day through separate databases and paper-based searches. Doesn't sound too bad does it? Until you consider that after Probitas and Dynamics NAV, they can now comfortably produce fifty searches per HOUR. Just imagine the difference in this business.

Even the best part of the old system has been improved. The scariest part for us was the replacement of a Linux server running a java-based search engine. This had been purpose-built for maximum performance to search a database of several million records. Even so, a complex search could take three minutes to run. These worst case searches now run in just a few seconds.

Other real-world benefits are the physical space saved, and the immense improvement in working culture. The people at FSSS understand and now respect the system and what it does for them, and for the company that employs them. There's time to interact, and actually enjoy a hard day's work without the old frustrations.

The turnaround has been nothing short of staggering.

COPING IN HARD TIMES

The credit crunch has hit all of us but particularly those companies focused on the property sector. Although First Scottish has had to make some painful decisions, it is now coping well. Managing Director John Yorkston recently cited the Nav system as one of the key reasons for the company's survival.

CONTACT PROBITAS

If you'd like to discuss what Probitas could do for your business, we're all ears! You'll talk with a qualified professional, not a salesman, and we guarantee an honest and realistic response. You have everything to gain...

“ We're in a property-related business in a difficult climate. For FSSS, this implementation was the single, most vital business-decision we made - and it just keeps paying off. To the employees and to the business, it's made all the difference in the world. ”

Jon Yorkston - Managing Director

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