

Portasilo and Forte

Partners in Change



York-based Portasilo Ltd, a member of the Shepherd Building Group, is split into two market-leading divisions; the Bulk Handling Systems Division, leader in the provision of bulk handling equipment, and Portastor Communications, Network Infrastructure Solutions

Providers to the communications industry.



Portastor Communications provide innovative solutions for the Wireless, Fibre and Satellite markets. Two new solutions are the Portacell

Temporary Cell Site, which boosts mobile phone capacity at social events, and the Smartcell Fast-Track Cell Site, a total permanent cell site deployed in two working days, saving network operators money and increasing their rollout capacity.

Portasilo has an excellent reputation in the UK and worldwide, and has doubled its turnover in the last two years - a trend that seems set to continue in line with the current worldwide boom in the communications industry.

This rapid growth pointed-up the need to install more sophisticated financial accounting and management information systems to respond to the increase in volumes and the rapidly changing organisation.

Choosing a Partner

As a result, a team was tasked to review available systems, and recommend a solution. They found eight possible solutions, which were assessed in detail.

While overall functionality and usability were clearly important, the team

identified a number of other essential functional requirements:

- hire invoicing with automatically applied recurring billing
- construction industry scheme support
- accounting for multiple VAT regimes
- foreign invoicing, including Euro support.

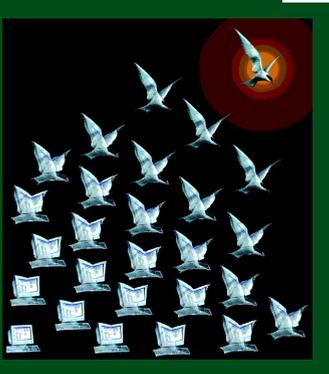
These requirements showed that only Forte was able to provide all the features in its standard package.

The detailed evaluation took place over several months, during which Forte consultants provided comprehensive workshop sessions in which options and ideas were explored with the team, end users, IT specialists and Group and Divisional management.

This evaluation period allowed the team, end-users, management and others to develop a two-way understanding with their Forte consultants. The availability to liaise directly with the package authors and the availability of direct support emerged as factors that were much appreciated, and contributed to the final decision.

Essential Ingredients

First-class reporting was a vital component in the provision of management information and here Cyberquery, supplied as an integral component of Forte, was considered superb in terms of its functional richness and excellent performance.





“We have no regrets in our choice of Forte”, says Bill Hardiman, Financial Director and leader of the implementation team, “It is delivering real benefits and will continue to do so. The close relationship we have enjoyed will members of the Forte team has been key to this result”.

Interfacing to existing group systems was also vital and was therefore explored in detail.

Portasilo also investigated the scope of data conversion; here the comprehensive nature of the Forte in-built interfacing facilities was used as a framework for mutual understanding of this relatively complex area.

The decision to proceed with Forte was made in September, a Forte Project Manager was appointed and an implementation plan and go-live milestones were agreed. A number of factors pointed to a relatively extended, phased implementation period. This decision took into account the need to fully involve the accounts and IT staff while recognising that they had on-going responsibilities.

An opportunity to review and rethink the structure of the Chart of Accounts was also incorporated into the plan. This reflected the need to consider both the on-going Group requirements and the need for timely financial information support for local management.

Coping with Change

To ensure maximum benefit from the facilities now available, Forte specialists worked in partnership with the Portasilo team and its IT specialists to design, produce and implement the required two-way interfaces so that financial data and code changes are passed routinely to the Group Accounting System. Data from the Group payroll, purchasing, fixed assets, petty cash and expenses system are regularly updated to Forte. The conversion of customer and supplier

data and related transactions was also incorporated in this phase.

The original December target for implementation of the General Ledger, was achieved earlier when it went live at the end of November with Sales Ledger following at the end of March and Purchase Ledger in June.

Immediate Benefits

- User-friendly and comprehensive access to integrated data.
- Directly-available Divisional views and a full drill-down to all the data.
- Times to produce sales invoices, many with multi-currency, multi-VAT regime content, were dramatically reduced, leading to staff savings (one person), and the flexibility to re-deploy others to more productive duties.
- Reconciliation procedures which previously took three days were now completed within 10 minutes.
- Receivables were markedly reduced due to tighter invoice turnaround and the greater opportunity for follow-up action.
- Form and layout of invoices was now much improved.

Real results from use of Cyberquery has initiated plans to make access to the wealth of management information more widely available, either through controlled access to Forte, or through views delivered to the desktop through Cyberquery or a Web browser.



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