

Printed September 08, 2009 07:03am AEST

Admin system breaks pain threshold

Dorothy Kennedy | April 08, 2008

case study | WaiveStar

GROWTH can hurt, and for Victorian supply chain management company WaiveStar, a particularly high pain threshold was reached when it realised it was taking two days each month for two administrative staff to invoice a single client.



Ayda Hornak says the system freed up seven or eight staff monthly

WaiveStar has 40 customers on its books, including big retail chains such as Crazy Johns and Blockbuster, and the finance and accounting system had become unmanageable.

When WaiveStar opened its doors in 2000, it had just three staff, including founder and chief executive Michelle Powell, and one major customer.

By the end of 2006, the company had ballooned to 35 staff and, with 40 customers on its books, was struggling with an outmoded invoicing system.

According to WaiveStar infrastructure and innovation manager Ayda Hornak, staff members were entering data up to seven times into separate databases, compromising accuracy and wasting valuable time along the way.

In a scenario typical of companies that grow quickly from a small base, a system of Excel spreadsheets and multiple, isolated accounting products was in use.

"What the growth was leading us to was a lot of time in admin," says Hornak. Blockbuster, for instance, has 300 stores, and each of them was being invoiced individually, Hornak recalls.

Two staff in financial administration spent two days each month processing the invoices.

WaiveStar wanted to move to a single application and point of entry for staff.

After a tender process in 2006, an integrated customer relationship management and enterprise resource planning package from Sage was selected.

The project kicked off in January 2007 and went live three months later.

Now, says Hornak, Blockbuster's invoices take an hour to complete and dispatch.

She estimates that the finance area has gained between three and four additional staff days monthly, and the business as a whole, seven or eight days.

While the change is striking, it is not uncommon for organisations to experience similarly dramatic improvements when they first upgrade from Excel spreadsheets to more purpose-driven software environments. Both CRM and financials have been fine-tuned over the past 12 months, says Hornak, with the CRM element undergoing a "huge" amount of customisation to adapt it to WaiveStar's environment.

WaiveStar has some unusual business requirements, she explains, as the company invoices on behalf of some clients.

"We almost act as a collection agency, and then we need to credit back."

The company plans now to move into a second integration phase in which it will try to integrate Accpac with its proprietary customer interface system.

There is still duplication of data entry at the warehouse site, Hornak says.

Although orders go through the online system, they have to be manually uploaded into Accpac.

WaiveStar wants to create invoices automatically as orders are uploaded, in a bid to free up staff resources.

"As far as our customers are concerned, nothing is going to change," Hornak says, but she expects the difference at WaiveStar's end will be "massive".

WaiveStar operates a Microsoft Windows environment and runs two Microsoft Exchange servers.

Proprietary systems are managed offsite in a data centre, while internal infrastructure and networks are managed on Exchange servers.

One is dedicated to Sage/Accpac products and the other to the internal network.

The company provides campaign fulfilment, mailing, distribution, specialist procurement and graphic design services, and supplies customers with marketing and promotional products such as brochures, posters and point-of-sale stands.