

Wastewater experts Jacopa receive specialist treatment to become standalone leaders

CLIENT: Jacopa
SECTOR: Wastewater Treatment
COST CATEGORIES: IT Infrastructure

After a successful management buyout, wastewater treatment specialist Jacopa was given just nine months to complete a full separation from parent company Ovivo.

With a complex IT infrastructure to replace and the tight deadline looming, Jacopa turned to Expense Reduction Analysts (ERA) for assistance. What they received was innovative solutions, best-of-breed technology and a competitive advantage.

THE CLIENT

Jacopa was created in March 2015 following the sale of Ovivo UK's municipal business to the existing senior management team. Some of the UK's best-known wastewater treatment brands now sit under the new Jacopa umbrella. The company specialises in the design and project management of systems and equipment used in wastewater treatment and offers its customers an end-to-end service, from product engineering to maintenance and repair.

THE CHALLENGE

Separating from their parent company presented many challenges for Jacopa. The most complex of these being uncoupling their IT systems and software. All of which were owned by the parent and all of which would need to be replaced. From a complex and bespoke Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system to simple yet vital desktop and email hosting solutions.

It quickly became apparent that the complexity of the transition to the new systems would cause a problem for the team at Jacopa who were already fully utilised with development and operation of the new business. So they turned to the experts for help.

Enter Simon Atkinson, IT specialist within the ERA network. Simon's impressive career spans all aspects of the industry including technical expertise, hardware, software and cloud computing. Throughout his career he has specialised in the support, development, consultancy and management of IT service across a range of different commercial models.

A particular area of understanding is software and services contracts. Simon now utilises his extensive insider knowledge to his clients' advantage; interpreting complex contracts and negotiating with suppliers in a minefield of jargon and often incomprehensible sales behaviours.



jacopa 
 CLEARLY WASTEWATER

"We had an ERP system that was imposed and wasn't best suited to our business. The new system has increased functionality and it's more intuitive. There's a lot more to come which can only be a benefit for how we work."

PETER SARGENT
 FINANCE DIRECTOR, JACOPA

Jacopa's Finance Director, Peter Sargent said, "we needed an independent IT specialist with the knowledge and expertise to establish our needs, research the market and then help facilitate the delivery and implementation.

"I've been using Expense Reduction Analysts for the last five years on other projects so I already knew they are a network of experts. I called Paul Pearse, my contact there, and asked if they had any IT specialists and he put me in touch with Simon, who demonstrated very early that he was the man for the job."

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MINIMISE RISK, MAXIMISE BENEFITS

Working with the directors and senior management team, Simon's primary objective was to minimise risk to the business during the transition and to bring the project in on time, and, on budget. In typical ERA style, Simon went above and beyond to ensure Jacopa's needs were not only met but also exceeded with maximum value add.

"The scope of this project was all encompassing. As well as identifying best fit suppliers, we had to consider the timings for implementing each piece of the jigsaw. Ensuring the correct dependencies were in place before migrating from one system to another had to be a staged and meticulously controlled process. In the case of the ERP for example, I reviewed almost 50 systems and then shortlisted eight suppliers who were invited to tender. For the front office functions (Outlook, Word, etc.) we had to look at a strategy that would allow Jacopa to have the same or better functionality over their four offices. To that end, we chose to use cloud technology and put all their Microsoft Office applications on a virtual desktop that can be accessed from any computer.

"It was critical that Jacopa had a system which services their key business areas of projects and engineering, without compromising in other areas, for example finance. This fit to business will have a direct and positive impact on productivity and running costs. Because the ERP system of choice is also cloud-based, the team can now access any piece of information, from anywhere on the planet, at any time. It's incredibly powerful tool and a valuable technological leap forwards for the business," explains Simon.

With full support of the team at Jacopa, Simon ran the programme and handled the controlled procurement of the new systems. Once all of the suppliers had been selected, there was a lot to do in a relatively short space of time. An intense period of planning followed but under Simon's expert eye, the waters remained calm. By managing relationships with the vendors, he was able to devise a flexible plan that everyone could operate against and change if needed.

"Simon definitely mitigated some stresses of the project. This was a huge milestone that we had to hit in the first months of the business. We didn't just want an ERP system, we wanted the right ERP system. I could have researched the suppliers but engaging with them and trying to establish if they met our needs was a mammoth project. Simon's input was just invaluable. Without Simon dealing with things, this project would never have happened and certainly not in the timeframe required," said Peter Sargent.

EFFICIENCY GAINS

The benefits of the successful project will be felt within Jacopa for many years to come and in some areas, for the life of the business. Thanks to their new cloud-based technologies, Jacopa will no longer have to carry the costs of employing IT personnel for the new business and will enjoy increased productivity as the administration and support has been outsourced to third parties.

Existing staff can now focus on delivering a high quality service to customers. In addition, future investment in hardware will be minimal. As the systems are virtual, there is no longer the need for high-spec hardware purchases and everything can be managed and supported remotely by an external company. This type of futureproofing is invaluable to any business, regardless of age or size.

In addition to the obvious cost-savings and efficiency gains achieved, Simon was able to alleviate a huge burden by implementing a beneficial financial arrangement which included phased payments to suppliers. This made the financing of the project over the period much smoother from a cash flow perspective. Jacopa acknowledges that a lumpsum outlay is not ideal for the business at this stage:

"I simply hadn't envisaged that this was something Simon could do. I thought he was just going to put a good vendor on the table but he went above and beyond. He's not just a technical expert, he's very commercially minded too. The financial arrangement Simon negotiated allowed us to spread the cost over the long term, further minimising risk to the business. Simon dealt with all the finance providers and provided a solution on the table to us," explains Peter Sargent.

"We had to match the right financial provider with the project. This was made more difficult by the height of the hurdle; as an MBO, Jacopa are a brand new legal entity and so, regarded as a start-up. This understandably had a detrimental impact on credit rating and perceived credit worthiness despite a full order book and a long trading history under their parent company. It's at times like this that supplier relationship management really can make or break a deal," adds Simon.

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BUSINESS ENHANCEMENT

For a highly project-driven business like Jacopa, it was crucial that their new systems provided operational and efficiency benefits. Able to support them not only as they took the steps into independence but also for the foreseeable future.

Jacopa now boasts:

- Best of breed technology deployed on an infrastructure that's as good as you can get
- A distinct competitive advantage when tendering for their own contract work
- A strong, future-proof system that will grow with them as they continue to expand

As Peter Sargent summarises, "In today's business environment, the demand for the UK's regulated water companies to deliver more effectively and efficiently is ever more prevalent. It is therefore imperative that the supply chain should align to this challenge with a focus on productivity and skills. Here, the opportunity to innovate around enterprise resource planning systems that use workflow templates, connect business processes across workflows, have remote input and ready access and use of data, can all play a part in maximising our business efficiency and delivering best value for our clients.

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