

Cranfield University leverages data assets with Logix4

Background

With 2,500 students, 1,800 staff and a turnover of £157 million, Cranfield University is one of the top five research-intensive universities in the UK. The activities of the university include teaching, research, design and development work in the fields of engineering, applied science, manufacturing and management. As the largest centre in Europe for applied research, development and design, the university enjoys superior links with industry and commerce and its customer base includes companies such as GlaxoSmithKline, Shell, Rolls-Royce and Boeing.

As with other higher education institutions, a significant percentage of Cranfield's income comes from research grants and funding and in the current climate, with increasing pressure on public funding, there is a greater focus on the university maintaining efficient and effective management of its resources and expenditures.

The university has been a user of UNIT4's ERP solution, Agresso Business World, for eight years and its financial controller, Ian Sibbald, is currently Chairman of the Agresso UK User Group. Sibbald was looking to enhance the efficiency of extracting and analysing data held within Agresso through the implementation of a real-time self-service data analysis and reporting tool. Logix4 provides exactly this, integrating with Agresso Business World.

Sibbald explained: "What really struck me when I first saw Logix4 was not only the quality of the product but also its ease of use. I recognised the value that Logix4 would deliver, as a self-service analysis tool that would allow us to interact quickly and easily with the data held in Agresso."

Implementation

The installation of Logix4 took only three days – including a half day's comprehensive training. The product is being used to support Cranfield's key financial operations - including: Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, General Ledger, Procurement and Fixed Assets - and, according to Sibbald: "On the same day installation was complete, we were already seeing value from the solution."

What particularly impressed Sibbald and members of his team were the speed and simplicity of Logix4. Elizabeth Evans, Cranfield's project accountant, explained: "The software quickly delivered visibility and interaction with Agresso that had simply not been possible before. Using the solution's drag-and-drop functionality allows us to explore, identify and analyse the Agresso data in ways we have not been able to previously."

Benefits

Empowering the users to easily access the data they need has resulted in Cranfield's finance department being able to pull together ad hoc real-time views of their finance data, in minutes, delivering the efficiencies they were looking to achieve.

A good example of this was evidenced recently, when the university was putting together its bid for Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funding for an e-marketplace system. Such a system would offer significant cost benefits to Cranfield by enabling them to streamline their purchasing processes, so that they can select and order goods from their suppliers electronically and track order status and receipt of goods online.



In order to build a good business case for why Cranfield would benefit from such a system, Sibbald and his team needed to demonstrate that, for the majority of suppliers they work with, purchase order numbers are assigned. The Cranfield team were able to run this query and gain immediate access to the data required. Subsequently, as a result of submitting its bid, Cranfield has been successful in securing HEFCE funding for an e-marketplace system.

Improved fixed asset ad hoc reporting

Another key area where Logix4 has delivered immediate value is Cranfield's fixed asset reporting which is the responsibility of Helen Castle, Cranfield's financial and treasury accountant. Again, the Cranfield team were aware that they could achieve efficiencies in the production of these reports by using Logix4. Castle has been impressed with the ease of use and flexibility of using Logix4 to generate ad-hoc fixed assets reports: "I was recently tasked with putting together a report which looked at the net book value of a particular area of assets owned by Cranfield. Before Logix4, this task would have taken a number of hours to complete and involved not only myself but another member of the finance team. However, using Logix4, I was able to generate the report in a matter of minutes, as well as saving it as a template for re-use in the future."

Castle is also confident that for this year's accounting audit the department will be better placed to handle any ad hoc queries the external auditors may have, by using Logix4 to give them fast and easy access to the data required.

More effective supplier relationship management

Through its seamless integration with Agresso, Logix4 is also helping Cranfield build a more detailed picture of its supplier network. By equipping the finance team with improved access to information about the university's suppliers, Sibbald and his team can now track the university's expenditure with its existing suppliers at a more granular level - for example, by school and/or product as well as monitoring the performance of individual suppliers. "Like many other higher education organisations, reducing costs is high on our agenda," said Sibbald. "Logix4 provides us with greater visibility of our suppliers and the value for money we are getting. In the longer term, this will help us to rationalise our supplier base, negotiating more competitive terms and with a smaller number of suppliers."

Delivering value from Day One

One of Logix4's unique capabilities is its out-of-the-box pre-configured Agresso analytics for core financial management activities, including Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable,

General Ledger, Budgeting, Procurement and Fixed Assets. These pre-defined analytics allow customers such as Cranfield to gain immediate value from Logix4, by removing the need for designing and developing custom reports. At Cranfield, the finance team are also utilising Logix4's pre-configured workflow analytics pack. This is helping them to analyse turnaround times for tasks such as approval of invoices and requisitions, in order to identify any potential bottlenecks in the processes.

Future

On a day-by-day basis, it is increasingly apparent to Sibbald and the finance team how Logix4 is delivering more value to their working environment. With the imminent introduction of a new Agresso module - Field Service Management and Automation - which will be used to handle all of Cranfield's estate management related activities, Sibbald can already see the benefits Logix4 will deliver through real-time analysis and reporting of this data.

Moving forward, Cranfield plans to extend further the use of Logix4 in areas such as General Ledger and Accounts Receivable. In addition, they are also planning to roll out the product to the procurement department and the university's five schools who are all existing users of Agresso.

Sibbald concluded: "Based on Logix4's seamless integration with Agresso and our experience to date, I would happily recommend Logix4 to other Agresso Business World users, who are looking to maximise ROI from their existing Agresso systems through faster and easier analysis of their data assets."

Benefits

- Flexible and easy to use
- Day One value
- Immediate access to financial data
- Greater visibility of university expenditure
- Improved control of supplier network
- Identified cost savings in procurement

Logix4



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UNIT4 is a top six mid-market ERP software player globally and the 2nd largest European ERP supplier. A revenue of €379.4 million was realised in 2009 and the company has 3,456 employees (31 December 2009). It is headquartered in Sliedrecht, the Netherlands and has offices in 14 European countries, as well as 6 countries across North America, Asia Pacific and Africa (plus sales activities in several other countries), for easy, local access to service and support.

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