

Bringing a green face to construction

A new “green” business that is changing the face of the construction industry is using web-based software to gain flexibility and improve customer service.

Benefits to Business	Cost savings	
	Streamlined processes	x
	Improved productivity	
	Increased sales	
	Reaching new customers	
	Product or process innovation	
	Improved financial management	x
	Staff development	
	Supply chain efficiencies	x
	Recruitment	
	Flexible working	x
	Improved customer service	x



About Eco Hoardings Ltd

Eco Hoardings Ltd supplies and installs hoardings for building sites. Unlike the traditional plywood option, Eco Hoarding's product is made from recycled PVC that is robust, secure, long lasting, reusable and recyclable. The hoarding system is available in a range of colours or can be printed to the customer's specification.

Eco Hoardings' systems provide an environmentally friendly alternative to plywood, which usually comes from non-sustainable sources in South America and tends to be either burned or put into landfill at the end of a building project. Eco Hoardings Ltd's green credentials recently received national recognition when the company was highly commended as one of nine finalists in the 2008 Green Leaders in Business Awards.

Accounting on the move

Eco Hoardings was set up in December 2007, with John Whaites as managing director. Responsible for all the financial aspects of the company, John needed an accounting system that was both powerful and flexible. In particular, he wanted to have access to up-to-date management information from wherever he was working but he didn't want to be bogged down with the task of data input.

John selected an online accounting system from Liquid Accounts, a company that he had encountered through his role as a business coach. Liquid Accounts has developed a suite of accounting software which is entirely web-based. Rather than providing its software to customers on disks, Liquid Accounts uses the Internet to provide Software as a Service (SAAS). The company also hosts all of its customers' data online.

John explains, "I chose Liquid Accounts because it is state-of-the-art software with a very modern approach. Because the software sits on the internet, I can access it wherever I am and I can also allow my book-keeper to have access so that she can take care of inputting the data for me. If there are any queries, she and I can look at the same information at the same time without having to be in the same place. We can talk through and solve issues then and there."

John continues, "There are several additional advantages to Liquid Accounts. Firstly, any updates to the software are applied automatically – I don't have to worry about installing updates myself. Secondly, the system stores all my data in three different locations, so I don't need to worry about security or back-ups. Lastly, it was designed as a web-based system – it's not traditional software that's had a web front end bolted on."

Liquid Accounts also has the flexibility to handle multiple currencies and VAT systems, which was of great benefit to Eco Hoardings when they were working on a major installation at Dublin Airport. John says, "We were being paid in sterling but had expenses in euros, so our accounting package needed to be able to handle both currencies. We also needed to file VAT returns in both the UK and Ireland and be able to cope with the different timetables of the two systems. It could have been a nightmare but Liquid Accounts were able to provide us with an extension to the system in a matter of days."

Tracking consignments via the internet

Eco Hoardings also plans to make use of SAAS to manage the entire process of keeping track of hoarding systems that go out on rental. The company's products are available either to buy or for rental for short-term projects such as 12 week refurbishments. When a customer rents a system, an Eco Hoardings crew delivers and installs it and then returns at the end of the project to dismantle and return it.

Working with the Automatic Identification and Data Capture Centre (AIDC) and consignment management solution company Tracker<<Back, Eco Hoardings is developing a system that will automatically track the delivery and return of rented hoardings. Each board will have an RFID tag and a unique identifier which will allow the crew to scan the boards when they are installed at the customer's site and again when they are collected at the end of the rental. The Tracker<<Back system, which is also web-based, stores all the details of who the customer is and where each board is. It also sends the customer a text message with a PIN which they input into the crew member's handheld device to acknowledge receipt and installation. Finally, when the rental is over and the boards have been collected from the customer's site, the system is able to link into Liquid Accounts to generate an invoice for the rental and for any damaged boards.

John comments, "The beauty of the Tracker<<Back system is that it completely removes the need for human counting of the boards. Using it, we will know exactly where every single rented board is and we'll be able to provide a smooth and reliable service and accurate billing for our customers. Plus, just like Liquid Accounts, it all operates online."

The Future

Eco Hoardings is in its youth and the company knows that there is work to do to persuade the construction industry to change its traditional working methods. However, new DEFRA regulations which came into force in 2008 require all construction projects worth over £300,000 to have a site waste management plan that includes details of the types of waste that will be removed from the site and where the waste will be disposed of. At the same time, a joint government and industry strategy for sustainable construction is urging constructors to sign up to a voluntary agreement to halve waste to landfill by 2012.

"There's no doubt that attitudes to site waste are changing," John says. "Eco Hoardings provides an ideal alternative to both the physical waste and the wasted cost of plywood hoardings. With the systems that we have in place, I can be confident that we can grow as fast as the industry needs us to."



Eco Hoardings Ltd.

Liquid Accounts

Tracker<<Back

AIDC

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www.liquidaccounts.net

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