Cranfield University

Cranfield University approaches $1m savings with Unit4 ERP software.

Despite massive changes in funding, fees, technical requirements, Cranfield University can control costs with ongoing IT savings of $140K per year still rising with easy-to-change, do-it-yourself solutions.

Overview

In the world of post-graduate academics, Cranfield University stands out for its five world class schools in Science, Engineering, Health, Defense and Management. With approximately 4,000 students, 2,000 staff, and $275 million in revenue, the 65-year-old University has two campuses approximately an hour outside of London. Cranfield's mission statement states two key criteria: global academic excellence and financial viability. The University is achieving both of these objectives via its rigorous academic programs; and a decision nearly 10 years ago to move away from technology software vendors that were costing the University tens - to hundreds - of thousands of dollars per year to support change.

Like all under-graduate and post-graduate universities worldwide, Cranfield is experiencing massive change from multiple directions: rising student tuition fees, escalating external funding requirements, new hardware and software-related technology needs, management/process re-organizations and increasing budget/economic pressures.

Also, like most academic institutions, the technology requirements range from staff-facing to student-facing, spanning the spectrum of financials, HR, payroll, facilities management and student records. This means that Cranfield University requires an enterprise software backbone that can support a number of different users, with differing roles and frequently changing needs.

In 2002, the University's enterprise resource planning (ERP) system was aging, expensive to run and was compromising the ability to meet its financial and user requirements. After a rigorous review and selection process, Cranfield University began its enterprise solution partnership with Unit4 and the Unit4 Business World (formerly Agresso Business World) solution. Multiple modules later, and with the redeployment of various IT staff members to more productive work, University officials can attest to almost $1 million in accumulated savings, and ongoing annual savings of approximately $137,000 per year.

The Need

Ian Sibbald, Director of Finance for Cranfield University and a management staff member for 18 years, tells a tale of his experiences with IT software vendors: "In the first IT scenario that I experienced for almost a decade here, we had adopted a best of class approach for Finance, Human Resources, Student Records and Estate (also called Facilities) requirements. Our Finance system alone required 10-20 days per year of quite costly IT consultants to implement the various technology, management or operational changes we needed."

Mr. Sibbald also said that the University needed to keep an Oracle database administrator on staff, simply to support day-to-day needs, without even factoring in any significant new projects. As funding, costs, fees and other economic pressures escalated, University technology costs continued to rise even though reporting, information access and other technology needs were falling behind. "We are a textbook model for an organization that lives in constant change, and our software systems did not have the agility to keep up."

Cranfield University evaluated Oracle and other ERP providers, including best of class solutions. "There was pretty much consensus by our entire Steering Board that we did not want Oracle, because we would have had horrific cost and maintenance issues," Mr. Sibbald says. "We wanted the ability to make changes ourselves, quickly, which we can get from the Unit4 Business World solution, but that we didn't see elsewhere in the market."

Cranfield University went live with Unit4 Business World's Financial Management solution in 2003, added Field Service & Asset Management for campus/facility management in 2009 and, in 2011, decided to replace the University's HR and Payroll solution. Cranfield's HR team went through a stringent six-month review process, comparing the capabilities of its current software vendor, but ultimately Unit4's ongoing, low-cost of change capabilities won out.

Today, Cranfield University benefits from three Unit4 Business World modules:
- Financial Management
- Field Service & Asset Management (Field Force)
- HR and Payroll

"The beauty of installing these Unit4 solutions is that we can use our own internal implementation staff," adds Mr. Sibbald. "We don't have to hire or pay for the usual software vendor army of highly priced, external ERP consultants."

Low-cost, ongoing 'do-it-yourself' change capabilities (even after deployment)

Unit4 Business World does not require software recoding for the majority of University changes required, and Cranfield University's IT and business staff can bypass the need for expensive external IT consultants.

"It's impossible to understate the massive changes we've been through in the past five or six years alone," Mr. Sibbald says. "Yet, even beyond the scope of mandatory financial, regulatory or economic change components supported by Unit4 Business World, the solution helps us to support our own internal process reviews. For example, if the head of a department leaves, we can take the opportunity to review the entire set of operational processes that we've created in that department, and support those changes easily with Unit4. In other words, we can go far beyond the typical dynamics of a headcount replacement, and we can support ongoing improvement opportunities."

Supported by Unit4 Business World, Cranfield University was also able to evaluate and undertake a major campus consolidation initiative six years ago. At the time, Cranfield had three campuses and decided to close one and move all the academic activities back to the Cranfield Campus. All of this was easily done using the Unit4 solution, leaving just the physical building work and moves to be completed.

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>
> **Mr Sibbald,**
> *University Director of Finance*

Agile, easy reporting options

Unit4 Business World's front-end reporting is used by a wide variety of Cranfield staff without assistance; via easily-labeled data entry selections and delivery options.

"What may sound fundamental isn't necessarily so." says Mr. Sibbald. "But since I've used a variety of systems I can safely say that end user reporting typically requires escalation to financial or IT people. With Unit4 Business World, a cost center is called a cost center, a project is called a project, etc. The ways that you can access the required information and deliver the reports is fantastic: using any device, from any location and at any time. Each time a research grant is allocated differently than in the past, that's a significant reporting change, which we can now support."

From a purely quantitative cost standpoint, Cranfield University can clearly show ongoing cost savings since the initial decision, thanks to Unit4. Elimination of external IT consultants, as well as the internal Oracle database administrator over an eight year period, has conservatively totaled $975,000 - almost a million dollars in total savings.

The continual savings, even before savings factored for the new HR and Payroll system, is an additional $137,000 per year. Less tangible, but also very important, are customer beliefs that Unit4 remains forward-thinking in its product and technology platform capabilities. "Unit4 is very good at listening to customer requirements and building them into future releases of Unit4 Business World. Customers are involved and we review development cycles; it's a very close and healthy partnership."

About Unit4

Unit4 is a leading provider of enterprise applications empowering people in service organizations. With annual revenue north of 500M Euro and more than 4000 employees world-wide, Unit4 delivers ERP, industry-focused and best-in-class applications. Thousands of organizations from sectors including professional services, education, public services, not-for-profit, real estate, wholesale, and financial services benefit from Unit4 solutions. Unit4 is in business for people.

Unit4 has been supplying administration systems covering Finance, Research, Students and HR to Further Education and Higher Education markets and now provides solutions to over 500 education customers worldwide.

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