"Accredo ties everything together for us. It works well with our existing systems and provides us with time-saving efficiency features."
Claire Hunt, Accountant, BestStart (right), with Karl Davidson of Zeal Systems.

Accredo lets childcare operator extract best value from new and existing IT investments

When a business goes through a sustained period of growth, such as that experienced by New Zealand childcare operator BestStart, replacing its accounting system with one that has more capacity and functionality to meet future demand sounds like a sensible, decisive step to take.

But switching systems is never easy. Out with the old and in with the new sounds great in theory, but in practice organisations often have to transition slowly, replacing elements of their existing business management system with new software, while continuing to maintain other legacy systems.

BestStart accountant, Claire Hunt says, when faced with that type of challenge, flexibility becomes paramount. "The system you are slowly migrating to needs to be adaptable to integrate into your existing software, and your IT support resources must have the expertise to tie old and new together."

BestStart is meeting the challenge successfully using Accredo's customisable accounting software, implemented by Zeal Systems, its technology support partner.

"One of the reasons we selected Accredo in the first place was the fact that it was customisable. Zeal said to us: 'Tell us what you want it to do because we can build Accredo the way you want to use it.'"

Hunt says the original goal when BestStart went looking for a new system was to move all the accounting function into Accredo, but to date they are using it selectively – for accounts payable processing, purchase order authorisation and creditor invoice approval.

"We haven't implemented Accredo in its entirety because the system we use for our main accounting function is integrated into an in-house reporting solution that receives feeds from a number of other programs. It's a unique and quite complex IT landscape."

Hunt says it would be foolish to unbundle everything too quickly. "We have a number of reports that our executive and other centre managers access and they are essential to our operation. We have many new childcare centres coming on board as well, so our IT team is under constant pressure. We are taking it one step at a time."

When any of BestStart's legacy systems are no longer fit for purpose – the most recent example being its purchase order authorisation system, where the latest release didn't have the flexibility

Accredo lets childcare operator extract best value from new and existing IT investments…continued

BestStart required – it replaces them with Accredo functionality.

Fixed Assets is a good example and will be the next Accredo module BestStart implements.

"The person who built and supported our legacy Fixed Assets register has retired. It needed replacing and Accredo is the obvious choice. It is a known and reliable entity and because we already have Accredo Accounts Payable running we can bring the two processes closer together."

Integrating optical character recognition software into Accredo to improve the control and accuracy of its accounts payable processing was one of the first jobs Zeal Systems undertook for BestStart.

> "What used to take half a day to undertake now only takes 15 minutes, thanks to Accredo."
>
> Claire Hunt, Accountant, BestStart

"Before that, we were outsourcing our accounts payable to a third party to process," says Hunt. "But because they were outside our organisation they didn't know all the ins and outs of our operation and as a result sometimes things didn't run that smoothly. Every time we contacted them to query an invoice or adjust a setting, there was a cost associated with it."

Zeal Systems suggested removing the third party and integrating data capture software, Xtracta, into the Accredo accounting solution and bringing the accounts payable processing in house.

"The integration connects Xtracta and Accredo and unifies our accounts payable process. We then created a web platform that tied into Accredo and Xtracta, that allowed all staff from the individual centres we have around New Zealand to log in and access the invoice and relevant support information."

The integration incorporated BestStart's existing approval workflow ensuring each invoice is seen by the person with the appropriate authority to approve (or reject) payment.

Hunts says the reporting Accredo is providing

BestStart is a huge benefit. "The reporting we get out of fixed assets and accounts payable now is vastly more efficient and insightful. Prior to Accredo, data had to be manually manipulated to glean any relevant information.

"And, if we need something reported slightly differently, Zeal's consultants are expert at picking up the information from Accredo and writing a report in the way we want it."

She cites the batch processing as a typical time-saving feature Accredo provides. Prior to using Accredo, BestStart had no way of easily distinguishing batches or identifying which invoices were in which batch. "We had to search for all the invoices individually, and it took a long time to drill down into the batches to find the one you wanted.

"But now with Accredo we can pick up the batch number and it will list the invoices in that batch, which makes reconciling and checking process a lot easier. Our management accountant says it is saving an incredible amount of time."

Automating routine tasks so staff can get on with more value-added duties is what Accredo excels at. Removing manual data entry is always a bonus, Hunts says.

"We use Accredo to handle our Trade Me marketing reconciliation. Trade Me provides us with a big Excel file of our country-wide marketing spend. This has to be inspected and approved by up to 40 managers. We used to have to manually enter all the information, but Accredo imports that directly. It pulls off all the information and puts it into separate invoices, so the only thing we have to do is scan down and make sure everything makes sense. One click of a button and it is sent off to the managers for approval."

Hunts says entering the data used to take half a day of intense concentration. "It was one of those tasks where you had to lock yourself away and let everyone know what you were doing so they didn't disturb you. Now it takes 10-15 minutes."

Accredo is flexible enough to work with BestStart's array of other business systems and provides an incremental integration path to take on more functionality when appropriate.

"It's a good option for us, as it lets us get best value for money out of our existing IT investments, but also allows us to move quickly to bring in Accredo functionality when it's needed. Along the way, we gain efficiencies thanks to the automation features Accredo provides."

For more information contact us at 09 373 5963
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