

case study Primark Stores Ltd

Business Collaborator improves efficiencies and slashes costs for Primark

Achievement

With ambitious plans for expansion throughout the UK, Primark Stores Ltd recognised the need to review the internal administrative systems within their Store Development and Facilities Management department, in order to move towards a paperless office, and improve overall efficiency. A web-based system, known internally as Digital Administration Data Management System (DAD), was developed and implemented using Business Collaborator's (BC) online programme management solution.

With around 30 development projects being delivered at any one time, the new system has improved storage and retrieval of all information and allowed for more effective collaboration with suppliers. As a result, it has facilitated a significant increase in new store openings and enabled the company to save significant amounts of time and money on administration.

Key Benefits

- Supported the new store development team and helped to facilitate a significant increase in store openings and refurbishment projects
- Reduced project administration costs by 50%, and overall programme costs
- Enables a standard approach to be used across all projects and allows everybody secure access to project information
- Dramatic reduction of paper processing, improved version control, and reduced email overload
- Improved efficiency in the project office with a reduction in the file back log and better control of the information and communication flow



Background

Primark Stores Ltd, a subsidiary of Associated British Foods plc, is a major retail group employing over 10,000 people. The company, well known (in Ireland as Penneys) for delivering fashionable quality merchandise at very competitive prices, is now targeting the under 35 age group and, with well over 100 stores already in the UK, is continuing its programme of rapid expansion.

The new store development team at Primark used traditional means for both internal and external communication on projects, which meant that CAD drawings, project documents, estimates for works, and other information was sent by fax, post, and email. This led to a plethora of project related information that required tracking, filing and sharing at appropriate times with a number of external suppliers across multiple projects and in several countries. As a result, administration staff spent 75% of their time dealing with basic administration tasks such as processing documents, which led to less time actually supporting the project team.

With a demanding schedule of new store openings ahead, Ian Brown, Head of Store Development says, "We have as many as 30 store development projects in progress at any one time and to keep up with this level of expansion, we needed to streamline our approach to project administration, specifically to improve document retrieval and increase productivity on projects. To achieve this we recognised the need to standardise our processes, procedures, and streamline the workflow by implementing an 'electronic office'.

Furthermore, with so many suppliers and external contractors involved in Store Development projects, effective internal and external communication mechanisms were needed to ensure success. To facilitate the high level of store openings required and to resolve the issues we established an internal project team focused on finding a solution that would meet our business needs."

The team initially set out by defining needs and what functionality they wanted in a system, and then investigated a range of potential solutions, from simply scanning in and filing paperwork through to full-scale document management solutions. Following a rigorous pilot project between six companies, BC was found to be the only solution that could deal effectively with both document and project management requirements; as well as providing the highest levels of after-sales service and support.

The Approach

Making a move from a paper-based environment to an electronic office was of key importance to Primark and Jan Bruning, Programme Director says, "With a project of this scale it was important to get buy in from the top down to ensure overall success. Any major decisions throughout the project were reviewed at board level. On a project level we adopted Prince 2 Methodology, which ensured that we had proper controls and quality measures in place to support the project."

Business Collaborator Limited (BCL) worked closely with the Primark Store Development team to clarify their business needs and to suggest the best ways to implement the Digital Administration Data Management System (DAD) as it not only needed to be accessed by the eight strong team internally, but also through a web interface by dozens of companies and individuals across Western Europe.

Derek Hannick, Project Executive at Primark says, "Right from the very start BCL provided excellent after-sales service and support, and were able to offer a good depth of knowledgeable input in how to optimise the system. They helped us to identify and analyze our business needs and worked closely with us to show how the system should be set up to meet these needs."

BCL configured Business Collaborator specifically to support the way the project team wanted to work. This meant that DAD was immediately familiar and therefore easy to use. In addition, Primark introduced 'document naming conventions' to ensure that everybody was working to common standards and could identify and access documents relating to certain projects quickly and easily. It was important that these standards were introduced and adhered to by everybody who used the system, in order to guarantee that key information, such as consent of building and planning controls, project drawings, and the latest project documentation were shared effectively and efficiently.

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Training was a key element to success and with over 100 users to train in a short period of time a 'train the trainer' approach was adopted. Members of the Primark Store Development Department were trained, who in turn trained one individual from supplier companies. The nominated person from each supplier then trained others in their organisation. BCL trained users on the functional aspects of the system allowing Primark to concentrate on educating users on the processes that had been defined and implemented within the system

Shortly after the commencement of the pilot, the team started to see the benefits of using the system. Instead of shuffling around bits of paper and emails it was now possible to access CAD drawings from a central location, safe in the knowledge that these were the latest versions. In addition, minutes of meetings were available almost immediately allowing actions to be completed faster and with visibility to others within the project. The system provided a full audit trail of activity such as who had received and read a particular drawing and helped team members to identify who was accountable and responsible for different information. The key objective of reducing the administration burden and streamlining the paper flow was met, and in addition other 'softer' benefits were realised including improved team morale, significant indirect cost savings, and a more efficient way of sharing interdepartmental information with the Facilities Management team.

Following the successful pilot DAD was deployed across all store development projects to over 300 users and Primark plan to roll the system out to all stores to support Facilities Management and Human Relations, to publish legislation and health and safety information.

The wheels are already turning to create even more value from the Business Collaborator solution as BCL continue to work closely with the Primark Store Development team to produce a completely tailored database that holds key data on all construction and property related issues. This will enable a wide range of information to be stored on projects from details of each property under development, to full details of project teams and critical information on planning schedules, through to dates of store openings. Once in place, the creation of customized Programme Management Reports will enable the senior management team to establish not only a high level view of how projects are moving forward but also to focus in to find more detailed information that will highlight any challenges that need to be resolved.

Key Lessons

- A degree of flexibility both in design and roll out is needed in order for users to contribute to the functionality of the system
- It is very important that everybody in the team is involved from an early stage so that any customisation requirements can be taken into consideration
- The system will be more readily accepted if everyone has made a contribution
- It was important to get buy in from the top down to ensure overall success

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