

Summit for AEC

RedSky IT launches Summit AEC, an entirely new project accounting system for architects, engineers and consultants

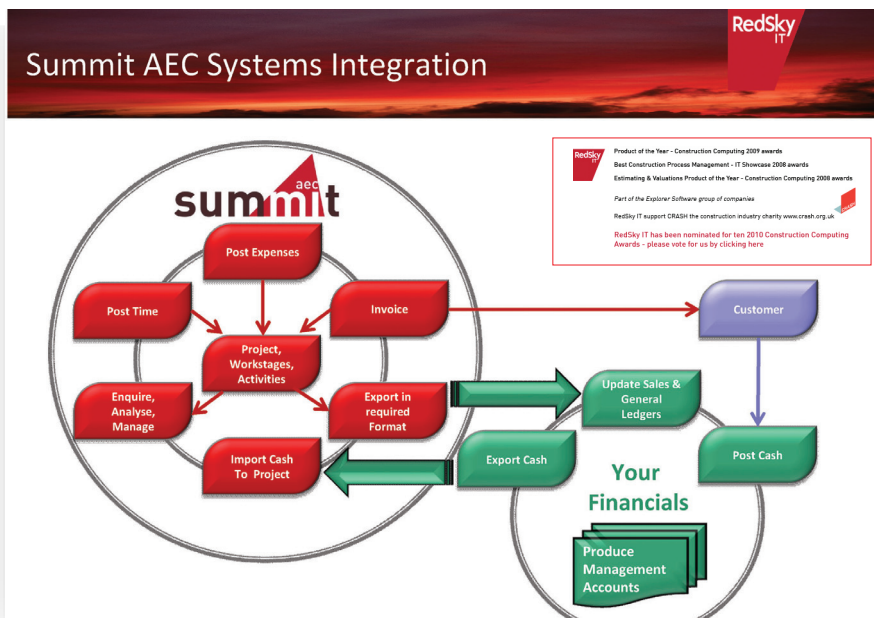
What's the difference between an Accountancy package for the Construction Industry and one for Architects? Quite a bit, as we shall see shortly. It's a question that RedSky IT have recently been asking themselves, as they examined their portfolio of products.

One of their old packages they looked at in more depth was the Progression AEC solution for their AEC customers, used by a couple of hundred companies. Progression is a project based solution, used to manage the people aspect of the business. This has been in the marketplace for a number of years and although its happily being used by many customers, its age means it is less attractive to new purchasers.

As RedSky IT have developed and continue to enhance their widely used modern software package Summit (designed for the construction industry to help companies manage the process of contract management), then the obvious choice is to expand the module set to cater for the AEC market. By building on the existing Summit platform, customers can be sure of adopting a system that is already proven and widely used by over 1,000 companies.

As the software is scalable, it can be readily used by companies in the SME arena, a market dominated by the broadly based packages like Sage and Pegasus, which have no inbuilt AEC specialisation. RedSky are therefore using their knowledge of the industry and proven software to fill this gap.

This also means that RedSky IT will now have the unique ability to provide a fully integrated suite of software for both construction and AEC customers in one package. Traditionally these solutions have



been developed specifically for these distinct functions and any companies that have a multi discipline business have always had to compromise one side of their organisation when choosing a system. Now they can have the benefit of a software package designed for them either as a single sector operator or a combined business unit.

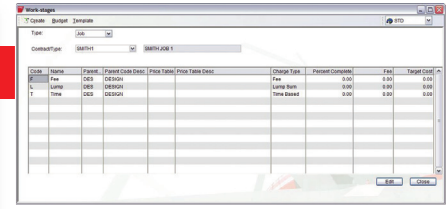
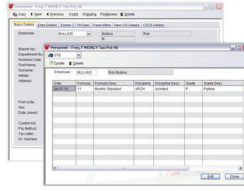
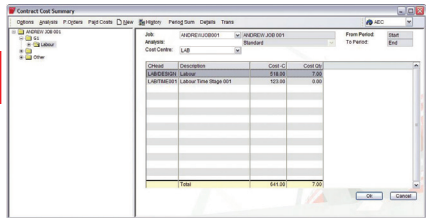
Although this will be the platform for any new business, existing customers of the current solution will be happy to know that they will continue to be supported for as long as they want to continue using the package, and that any customer wishing to take advantage of any features in the new Summit AEC modules will experience a smooth transition of their data.

CONSTRUCTION VS ARCHITECTS

Actually it's not that difficult to differentiate between an accounting system for the

construction industry and one designed for architects. The former is contract based, and enables contract managers and surveyors to keep track of costs such as sub-contractors and materials. Designed for a wide variety of general construction companies and specialists contractors like mechanical and electrical engineers, civil engineers and builders engaged in large scale residential and commercial development, Summit does just that.

AEC accounting however is still a service based proposition, with people as the principal costs also generating income. As well as having to look after costs, businesses also need to focus on fee accrual, and the efficient billing thereof! That doesn't mean to say that the costs can't be broken down between contracts and projects. With the flexibility you would normally expect from a company that supplies Summit, the foremost contract



management suite, Summit AEC will handle both AEC time and expenses as well as fees, and sub-consultant costs that occur when the services of specialist consultants are sought - such as the farming out of the structural analysis element of a job during the design of a building.

MARKET ANALYSIS

RedSky IT is not looking to persuade its existing customer base to start using Summit AEC, although some amongst them could certainly consider adding it to their existing software tools. Current marketing activity is geared towards new customers with the ability to help the smaller practice, with around 20+ fee earners.

This is the sort of company that has grown on the back of professional architects, where professional accountants are a luxury, and where most of the fee calculations are handled on extensive and inflexible spreadsheets - if they are not carried within the boss's head! Fee Earners might be posting their Timesheets manually into Excel documents, but the sheer volume of files and their reworking places a serious overhead on the business, like the 3000 or so re-postings reputed to be raised on major projects by some of RedSky's prospective customers.

Summit AEC, in contrast, enables fee earners to enter, on time sheets, hours worked for whom, why and for what fee. It goes directly into the appropriate module of Summit AEC, and is used to update all records instantly. It manages emails, and links both them and documents to projects. It comes with an easy-to-use browser screen and enables users to log directly into projects, and, for added

emphasis, can be customised to suit individual preferences. A project oriented contact database module is available with correspondence tagged to both personnel and projects. There are also extensive graphic output tools for displaying output in an easy to read format that can be incorporated into personalised dashboards.

ONLINE ADVANTAGES

The main advantage of using Summit AEC is that it can be a hosted solution. It can be run in-house, but apart from the collection of data, which can all be handled automatically from remote devices, system management doesn't amount to a full time job. Getting RedSky to host it relieves the in-house IT guys, who tend to be hardware and network specialists rather than application whizzkids, from getting entangled in financial quandaries.

Putting it online has other advantages too. Users can either purchase or rent Summit AEC, and for the latter there is no up-front investment in software, with costs only growing in line with a company's growth. You are not spending a fortune to manage a fortune! Users can even specify which modules (currently standing at around 20), personnel, charging, email management, documents, etc. that they want to start with, and bring in the others when they are ready. For instance, if sharing documents is the main reason for using the software, users can start on that, and bring in the financial aspects later.

Being online also means that data can be entered from any location, using a variety of tools, remote workstations, laptops, tablets, and the latest handheld iPhones and Blackberries. Previously, users would

have had to log in to send the data to the office - now they have direct access to the software.

Summit AEC is currently under Beta testing with a major customer which, incidentally, also manages a construction practice. Other customers are also looking at the software, particularly the environmental divisions of civil engineering companies, whose land reclamation studies fall under the heading of consultancy, rather than contractual. RedSky is also aiming for wider coverage than just the UK with Summit AEC, starting with their operation in Dubai. The company believes that the new release has greater potential than its current coverage in the Middle East, North America and the UK.

MARKET PROGRESS

An interesting aside from Mike Joyce, RedSky IT's Sales and Marketing Director, given during a recent demonstration of the software in Cardiff. Mike said that, based on conversations he'd had with his customers, the construction industry was starting to rebuild again, after being hit pretty hard by the current financial crisis. Although many projects and PFI contracts were cancelled there is now fresh activity - but most of it is not the result of new projects, but rather the digging up of old ones that had been 'mothballed'.

The industry is still pretty leery about spending, and is seeking value for money. This is why the launch of Summit AEC is so important, says Mike, as it will enable mid-sized practices to keep a tighter hold on what they spend, and, more importantly, how effective they are in billing for their services.

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