



Road Service Consultancy - Northern Ireland - provides a good news story in a part of the UK that has, in the past, been all too used to negative publicity. Formed in 1999, following an internal re-organisation, Roads Service Consultancy (RSC) is the engineering services delivery arm of Roads Service, the sole road authority in Northern Ireland, responsible for a staggering 25,000km of roads, 8,000km of footways, 6,000 bridges, 237,000 streetlights and 375 car parks.



Roads Service Consultancy

With 370 staff based at 6 main and 12 satellite offices, RSC is the largest organisation of its type in the UK. It is an organisation that is in a continual process of self-improvement and prides itself on openly addressing the Project Management needs of its customers. RSC realised very early in its development that increased use of 'smart' technology could bring major benefits in improving the efficiency of the organisation and the resultant savings provided.

Head of Consultancy, Derick McCandless, picks up the story: "As a new and diverse organisation we needed an IT data retrieval, time capture and project management system that would help us manage our business efficiently.

Fact file

About Roads Service Consultancy

Sector: Public Sector Consultancy

No. of Employees: 370

Turnover: £15m

Solution used: Progression AEC, ETC, ProForM

About Ramesys

Ramesys is the UK's leading provider of line-of-business software solutions to the Construction industry. Through an extensive portfolio of products and services, Ramesys enables organisations of various sizes to maximise opportunities via technology.

It had to be able to cope with a large variation in job, as we carry out many different functional activities (49 at the last count), from bridge inspection to motorway resurfacing and from traffic calming to by-pass design and construction. Jobs are split into standard sub-activities, such as survey, design, tender, construction etc., each of which is managed and measured separately."

For Ramesys, the process of matching systems from its AEC division to the needs of RSC proved both stimulating and rewarding, according to Warren Jones, Customer Services Director at Ramesys, who attended many of the initial meetings in Northern Ireland.

"We realised from very early on that this was an inclusive organisation that believed in the partnering process from beginning to end – this enabled us to get inside the skin of the organisation and match our technology to their needs. This is not a one-size fits all approach."

As part of the process both organisations entered into a Partnering Charter Agreement. This was to set the co-operative

tone for the development of the project, with core principles enshrined in this agreement that included:

- Open communication and trust
- Reasonable compromise rather than positioning
- Innovative 'win-win' problem solving to maintenance issues
- A desire to work together again

Derick McCandless said "RSC are very much governed by the 'Best Value' imperative which requires public organisations like our own to measure customer responses to the services offered and satisfaction attained. We therefore apply the same rationale to all our relationships whoever the supplier. Ramesys were very appreciative of our need for this and responded to all aspects of the charter in a positive and helpful manner throughout the implementation process. The collaborative teamwork and joint problem solving approach helped us deliver this complex project within estimated cost."

To ensure that the Ramesys system would fully satisfy the needs of Roads Service



Consultancy, a Users Assurance Group (UAG) was set up to represent a consensus of opinion across 370 staff in eight separate RSC business groups which are located throughout Northern Ireland. Many of these groups already had their own rudimentary systems and it was the job of the UAG to bring a consensual requirement to the table to which Ramesys could respond. This was enshrined in a specification called the Operational Requirement Document.

The Operational Requirement established that time recording, invoicing and project management were key imperatives. Cost analysis facilities were also essential due to the fixed price nature of Roads Service Consultancy's fee structure. Regardless of how long a job may take, RSC would receive a fixed fee based on the initial estimated cost, so it was essential to ensure that pricing assumptions were correct.

"We installed Progression, ETC and ProForM as a core IT tool realising that the key disciplines applied to the project management process here were survey, design and delivery," said Warren Jones.

Progression AEC is a fully integrated solution designed purely for the professional services organisation. It helps deliver relevant and timely financial and project management information geared to specific business needs. This ensures that users have access to up-to-date information in any format at any time, from a single data store.

Electronic Time Capture (ETC) allows staff to record their own time in a Windows based spreadsheet style application making ETC easy to use. Project details are available from the Progression AEC database, entries are always secure and validated and errors are reduced. All the user needs to enter are the hours worked against controlled project/job information. Timesheet information is simply updated to the central information store as and when required from the user's own PC.

ProForM may be used to forecast and re-forecast for individual projects or programmes wherever and whenever required. Draft forecasts can be created 'off line' and 'live' forecasts can be copied for stand alone working on site or working remotely. Project forecasts are generated by allocating resources across the life of the

project. Where specific personnel are required, staff time can be allocated using lists of available staff, or higher level forecasting using disciplines and grades may be used.

"The objective was to install a system that allowed this diverse organisation to measure and evaluate its input against the fixed price that it had quoted. Unlike many project management companies with whom we work, Roads Service Consultancy set themselves a fixed price and our systems were designed to provide them with core data to evaluate whether they were constantly improving the service they offered for that price. Normally ETC is used to record consultancy time which is then charged directly back to the client. Here RSC were adopting it as part of its policy of delivering continual improvement against set targets," added Warren.



Derick McCandless explains, "We have adopted a fixed price policy for all teams and all activities. This ensures that each team has clear output targets to meet and has an improvement incentive, neither of which would be present with traditional time charging. It is obviously important to ensure that the fixed price quoted is right for us - and that our income from each activity exceeds our costs to the required extent. To do this, reports have been designed for comparison of cumulative time costs for any activity or sub-activity within each team, against the income realised through fixed fee charges. The system therefore enables us to confirm our pricing structures, measure cost improvement and benchmark business performance across all teams. Thus the Ramesys system provides us with a very powerful business analysis and improvement tool."

The guiding beacon for the implementation process was always the Operational Requirement Document. This set out the specification which, whilst firm in terms of output requirements, allowed for a degree of flexibility in how each requirement was met. A management team from both Ramesys and RSC set up camp in a part of RSC's Downpatrick office that became known as 'mission control'. The allocation of this dedicated team was important, as those involved in the implementation of the systems would eventually be training their own people to run the specific Ramesys tools Progression, ProForM and ETC which were required to address RSC's needs.

Derick McCandless continues:

"The provision of a dedicated team for several months, to cover development and implementation of the system, meant that we had to re-prioritise other important business development work, but it was a price worth paying as this will be our core business system for the next 5 to 7 years and it was essential that we got it right. By putting the effort in up front we ensured that system functionality and business processes were well aligned and that staff got exactly what they expected. As a result, the system has been quickly and easily adopted for use by users."

With 370 staff in 18 separate offices across the country, there were significant communications issues when putting the system in place, meaning that total transparency of information and continuity of Ramesys management input was important to the whole process.

"We cannot fault Ramesys here," said Anne Manning, Project Manager at RSC. "They ensured that we had continuity of staff on site throughout the project. This was very important to us from when they first tendered, through to implementation. It was also borne out when it came to training. If there was a shortfall in our own training capability their resource was quickly to hand to help get our people up to speed."

For Ramesys, the opportunity to work with RSC provided some valuable learning points.

"This was an important installation for us," said Managing Director of Ramesys, Mark Chambers. "The sector in which we

operate have not previously had the same commercial dynamics evident that are apparent at RSC. The policy of continuing improvement is admirable and this has led us to review our own company procedures. For instance, the Partnering Charter is a very good idea which we are now adopting with other projects and clients."

Roads Service Consultancy's Director of Finance John McNeill, views the project from the aspect of what cost benefit is derived by the investment in Ramesys technology. He sees the relationship as something which both parties have invested in for the long term.

"The relationship with Ramesys is something that will be very important in helping us reach our business targets. When you are planning for a relationship lasting a minimum of 5 to 7 years it has to be right and we are very happy at this time," said John McNeill.

Derick McCandless agreed that continued good relationships with Ramesys were important. "Having now implemented the system, we have reached one peak but have a number of others to climb in terms of achieving our continuing drive for efficiencies. The new technology is vital for helping us to meet those goals and from their performance to date, we see Ramesys as playing a key role in partnering with us to gain that success."

Following the successful conclusion of the implementation project, Ramesys and Roads Service Consultancy have updated their Partnering Charter and look forward with anticipation to a continuing relationship based on collaboration and mutual trust and respect.



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