

Sewell Group



Background

Sewell Group is one of the UK's most successful and well-regarded estates services companies. With a pedigree that stretches back to its founding in 1876, it is recognised today as a 'Sunday Times Top 10 Best Company to Work for Business'. Its services range from large-scale project development and delivery to hard and soft Facilities Management and legal compliance services.

Sewell's client portfolio include schools, health and community facilities and offices, which represent more than 60,000m² of buildings and contain some 33,000 assets – everything from boilers and medical lighting equipment down to individual light switches. The company's ethos is to help its clients get the best value from their estate, while ensuring that it meets all their business and organisational needs.

In 2012, it decided to modernise its CAFM strategy, replacing a legacy system with a new platform that would be more adaptable, resilient and could be developed quickly to meet new challenges and business requirements.

As Director Martin Stead explains, the company approached the CAFM market with a substantial wish-list.

"In a nutshell, we had an ageing product in place," he says. "We weren't comfortable that it was being developed quickly enough and our relationship with the supplier was not strong enough. We needed a step-change.

"We reviewed the market place and we reviewed our own requirements, and sent our wish-list out to a long list of providers. We then narrowed them down to six, based on their answers. Finally, we asked our top two for product

demonstrations. This all took place in March 2012 and in August, we chose FSI's Concept Evolution™ - with the aim of going live in December!"

Concept™ met Sewell's top two requirements head-on: an intuitive and engaging client interface; and the ability to integrate core functions seamlessly.

"As a business, we're completely focused on our people and our customers," says Martin. "The new system had to be easy to use while providing the right levels of reporting. A lot of CAFM packages out there claim to do very similar things to Concept™, so assessing the market essentially became a comparison of user interfaces and the ways in which the different elements linked together.

"An off-the-shelf product won't give you what you want immediately, but you should be able to develop it to suit your requirements – and that is one of Concept's™ biggest assets, particularly with the way the Workflow module helps you to automate business processes. Our wish-list was extensive and some of the requirements were quite specific. FSI responded by showing how the system could meet them, or had the potential to with a certain amount of tweaking."

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The challenge

A tight deadline drove the project. The licence for Sewell's legacy CAFM system was due to expire in December, giving the company and FSI just four months to import the existing data and implement Concept Evolution™. It was completed on target.

"We had been through this process with the previous system so we knew the scale of the challenge – the volume of asset information we were dealing with, exporting it, quality-checking and getting it ready for importing to Concept™," says Martin.

"And because we'd done it before, we were probably more informed than many businesses going into similar projects. That made us quite a demanding customer at times! We would present FSI with a request and they would have to interpret it into something that Concept™ could perform."

Martin and his team made a point of visiting FSI as well as inviting FSI's consultants into the business, helping to ensure that the people on both sides knew each other and establishing a strong cultural fit. It was, says Martin, important to know FSI as a supplier and partner. "A close relationship with your implementation consultant is essential," he adds.

The business benefits

Sewell's initial Concept Evolution™ package included the Help Desk, Asset Management, PPM, Resource Planner, Quotes and Workflow Lite™ modules, as well as Concept Reach™, FSI's light front-end web application which gives non FM-specialists the benefits of accessing and using information in the system. Concept Connect™, FSI's web-enabled management reporting tool, soon followed.

The system was well-received. An extensive training programme helped to drill awareness of its features and benefits, and knowledge of how to use it, down through the business. From an efficiency point of view users were able to use it immediately to plan their work and record what they had done.

"I would describe the system as the hub of our estates business," says Martin. "It helps to control everything that we do, and provides a platform for the team to deliver world class customer service."

"The PPM module brings everything under control and helps us to make sure that we are meeting all our clients' statutory obligations. We also use the Resource and Booking modules to provide some internal services, and the Help Desk to provide aftercare for our construction sites."

One of the main benefits has been Concept's™ role in winning Sewell new business.

"This is the big story of our investment in the system," says Martin. "It went a long way to helping us secure two new projects. Along with our business ethos, Concept™ was a winning feature of our bid."

Sewell's clients have also embraced Concept Reach™ - the number who use the portal to access the system and monitor the status of their contracts, tasks and services doubled within eight months after the system went live.

"Concept™ is a very open system. You can always see what you are doing, and when," says Martin. "It makes the Help Desk more efficient, and increased automation means you spend less time on the phone following up requests."

The strong relationship with FSI has been at the heart of the project's success and is already leading to further developments in Sewell's planned use of the system.

"Sometimes you get the 'A' team selling you the system – and you never see them again," says Martin. "The 'B' team turns up to install it. Not here. Our account manager at FSI has stayed with us throughout the project and we're continuously benefiting from that original consultation as we move into the next phases of the deployment."

These will include implementing the Digital Dashboard and SLA modules, and a scoping exercise for FSI GO™, the mobile platform which brings Concept™ to the tablets and smartphones of engineers and contractors in the field, and enables instant communication and updates across the system. Martin expects FSI GO™ to be rolled out by the end of 2013.

Preparation is essential for any business embarking on a similar project. It is vital to have a clear idea of your business processes so that they can be understood by the consultant and implemented in the best way.

"But the old way is not necessarily the right way," counsels Martin. "Concept Evolution™ could actually help you to be more flexible in your processes, so keep an open mind."

"A system like this is a big commitment, and that should not be under-estimated. Your CAFM consultant can't do it all for you, so you should dedicate serious time to the project internally and appoint a project manager who can rally the rest of the team."

"Finally, look forward to continuous development. Going live is just the start with Concept™. We just implemented the Help Desk initially, but we've steadily added other modules since, and using Concept Reach™ and Connect™ to give clients and contractors portals has added a new dimension to our services. This is very much an on-going process."

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