

CASE STUDY

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AGS Accountants



AGS is one of the leading accountancy firms in the West Midlands. A growth strategy based on service development has seen the firm develop beyond pure accounting to embrace corporate finance, tax planning, financial services, business and management consulting. One of the greatest challenges it faced on that journey was its IT provision – but after an introduction to e-know.net, it was all plain sailing.

At A Glance:

Client: AGS Accountants

Sector: Accountancy

Employees: 25

Applications hosted:

MS Office, MS Exchange, Sage, MYOB, Solution 6

Project snapshot:

Delivery of an enabling infrastructure that has underpinned delivery of strategic vision

e-know.net on AGS:

A firm that saw the transformation potential of managed service from the outset.

A forward thinking accountancy firm who have utilised outsourcing to enhance their strategic move into being a multi services financial solution.

AGS on e-know.net:

A 'no brainer' of a concept executed brilliantly.

Challenge

From the get-go, AGS founding partner Steve Aston had a vision for his company. He believed that he could take the best of the national firms – the multi-disciplinary approach, the breadth and depth of expertise – and marry it to that which regional firms could offer – client care, local knowledge and competitive pricing. He knew that to make that happen, he and his partners would have to concentrate on core competencies, on doing what they knew best – their professional role for clients, their management role for AGS.

But Steve also recognised another criterion for success. “We had to get the IT spot on. And that wasn't just about having the right infrastructure to support a growing company and to link up with associates as we brought them on. It was far more about that extra 10-20% that dynamic, innovative IT delivery could give us. A simple example would be the ability for us to work on site but still be able to access our data; another would be our ability to provide clients with extranet facilities and on-line reporting; and yet another would be our ability to deal with files and mail while on the move.”

Steve's concerns in respect of the in-house environment revolved around the following:

- The firm's ability to recruit, keep and afford a sufficiently talented IT team
- Taking the risk of investing in an IT team that was a disproportionately large overhead but essential for the firm's ambition
- Wasted money/resource from focusing on 'feeding and watering' systems rather than on added-value projects
- The management time and effort needed to drive the team forward
- The budgeting difficulties associated with a fast-growing firm
- Potential over-reliance on an IT head
- Scaling issues if operations needed to be quickly ramped up or streamlined

Summarizes Steve, “I think we faced a dilemma shared by many an SME. We wanted, in fact we needed our IT to be as good as it could be to support the excellence that we were striving for in our professional work. We simply weren't confident that we could do that. We're not techies, our only interest in IT is that it performs reliably and is enabling; for us it's the key to unlocking added value, to generating a clear competitive difference.

"...The addition of e-know.net to the AGS team was the springboard for growth fundamental to our ambition to become a full service accountancy and business consulting organisation. They've allowed us to stick to what we're good at - and with their support, we can get even better..." Steve Aston, AGS Accountants.

Solution

When Steve Aston was first introduced to e-know.net, there was immediate recognition – here was a company that, like AGS, was committed to its own core competency: delivering a depth and breadth of IT expertise to its clients as a managed service. In e-know.net, Steve saw his new IT department. "It was more like a super department, to be honest. By outsourcing my IT, I wasn't losing control but gaining a whole new resource, a more expert, experienced and qualified one than I could ever have put together in-house. And their approach to clients was very similar to ours too, which instilled more confidence. From the off, it was a very consultant-like relationship, very hands-on and proactive, with proper project management discipline that ensured our eventual change-over took place without anyone actually noticing anything. Everything was fully explained and costed, it was very transparent and honest, and at the end of the migration to the e-know.net data centre, I felt a huge relief that at last we had the infrastructure and on-tap capabilities to underpin the strategy"

Benefits

The primary return AGS has seen from the move to managed service is what it has brought back to the senior team – precious time and peace of mind, gains that are being usefully redeployed elsewhere in the business. With a tight Service Level Agreement in place and a close working relationship with the e-know.net account managers, Steve is relaxed about day-to-day operations and future developments. He is also happy with the other advantages accruing to the firm from his decision to outsource:

- Known, fixed per seat costs enabling easier budgeting and removing uncertainty
- Hugely scalable, supporting rapid business growth
- Fast user set-up, boosting productivity and efficiency
- Secure remote access, enhancing flexibility and mobility
- Client access to data, improving service and delivery
- 100% management time devoted to business, speeding development and expansion
- Lean operating, minimising waste and reducing stress
- Performance bound by Service Level Agreement, affording greater control and accountability
- Low physical impact, reducing power consumption and simplifying office moves/alterations

Client verdict

"The quality of the service and the overall concept is such that I will happily promote managed service to my clients as a way of transforming their businesses – that's how impressed I've been. The addition of e-know.net to the AGS team was the springboard for growth fundamental to our ambition to become a full service accountancy and business consulting organisation. They've allowed us to stick to what we're good at - and with their support, we can get even better."



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