



APS Case Studies

Busing Russell & Co Ltd

Interviewee - Brian Busing – Director

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Involvement in selection process

Brian is responsible for IT within the firm – which has a total of 30 people on the team.

Key Quote

APS provides reliable software at an economical price, that allows us to compile, analyse and present our clients' data our way, and software that allows us to monitor our own practice our way, and tax software that allows us to prepare tax returns the IRD way.

Section One General

When did your firm implement its APS Advance Practice Management system.

In 1994 – we were one of the very first APS clients and we came across from Hartley.

Which edition did your firm sign up for – a) Professional or b) Enterprise

We use Advance Professional

How many users do you have?

approximately 20 users

Which APS products have you taken out licences to use? (PM, Tax etc...)

Advance Practice Management, Xcede Professional Accounting and Advance Tax

Who was your previous supplier and how long were you using that supplier's software for?

Hartley – we had been with them for many years. That is, of course, where we first met Shane Compton who had been with Hartley for years before setting up APS.

From start to finish, how long did the meeting, testing and decision-making process take that saw you move over to APS?

It was actually quite quick. We knew the APS people and we knew their attitude to meeting their users' needs. It certainly wasn't a gut feel that prompted us to go with APS – our decision was very much based on the goals that APS had set themselves.

Now that you have been using APS products for more than 10 years, has the product and service met your expectations? If so, please tell me about it.

The only set back we have ever had was in the very first year when APS was trying to set up and do lots of things all at the same time from structuring their business to writing the software to building their team. We knew they would get through – and they did. Since then both product and service has been outstanding.

One of the features of their business in the early stages was that they always shared information with us – every patch and correction was documented so the users knew that all the fixes were being taken care of – and the priority they were being given. They shared with us the timeframes. This gave confidence to the users that, while the software was still being developed we knew what was coming through and when – there was never any fobbing off. Now the Advance is a mature product suite but APS continues to enhance it – and they still keep us up to date. The difference is that now it is all about ongoing enhancements, not fixing.

APS prides itself on its ability to listen to its customers regarding their business needs and business aims and its commitment to then work closely with customers to meet and achieve them. Tell us about the APS approach from your perspective.

It is one of their strongest points. They support a user-group network that offers client feedback direct to APS – this works well because the user groups cull out the radical ideas and put forward working solutions. We are a member of one of the user groups and we meet three times a year. We also attend the annual conference. Both the user groups and the conference have the added benefit of facilitating discussion about IT among many other practices.

Section Two Product

Functionality Testing

Looking at APS from a product perspective, what were the most important factors from a functionality point-of-view that were seen as critical to your business – the things that APS had to have if it was to be considered as a your practice management and tax preparation software provider?

The number one factor was and remains APS's Xcede report writer. Its flexibility mimicked the Hartley Flexol report writer and took that flexibility forward. What we value is that Xcede allows accountants to be different from each other – we can create and format the reports 'our way' and not be forced to follow the dictates of the software writer. It is totally flexible to our practice – it's a very strong feature.

The second most important aspect is that APS software integrates with all Microsoft products.

Thirdly the APS programmers have utilised the latest Microsoft programming tools and modules – this keeps them very up-to-date and allow us to extract data from the different areas of practice information we need. We control the usage of our data because of the MS SQL Server platform that the software is written on.

APS's recent award of Microsoft Gold Certified Partner status is a confirmation from Microsoft that APS is making use of the latest MS tools and taking the benefits quickly through into practices.

did you feel that APS was ahead of its competitors in terms of its functionality and how did you verify the fact? (e.g. pilot / product testing methodology)

It took a substantial planning effort at the outset which has paid itself back many times over. By planning the implementation thoroughly we have been handsomely rewarded by using the automation features within Xcede Professional Accounting. We made some mistakes in the implementation of Practice Management which we have since changed. All in all, ease of use is awesome.

Ease-of-Use Testing

From a functionality point of view you have told us why you moved to APS. Ease-of-use is also important: how did you make sure that Advance is easy-to-use from a practitioners' perspective?

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Future Development

What would you like to see APS add to its product set in its next releases of Advance that will assist your business? What does it need to do to stay ahead of its competitors?

I think it is that far ahead it needs little by way of improvement. All I think APS needs to continue with is its partner programme – whereby the programmers don't re-write software but partner with other suppliers who have already written individual elements. Export and import integration is the key through strong relationships with other software suppliers.

So the recently launched Integrated Practice Solutions venture which APS has entered into with Acclipse, Business Fitness and Quicken is a good thing – it brings together software from different houses for the benefit of clients.

Section Three Corporate Situation

Were the following factors important to you in determining if APS was the right provider for Busing Russell & Co Ltd to go with:-

The fact that APS is a profitable business? APS prides itself on the fact that it has posted a profit every year since inception in 1991.

Profitability is very important – we all need APS for the future – who wants to be left with orphan software? Profitability ensures that our APS software continues to be developed and enhanced into the future.

The fact that the Advance product set traces its lineage and development path directly to its first release in 1994 there has been no deviation from the product roadmap – merely incremental annual upgrades to the product. This has meant that customers have not had to waste time and money implementing new systems on an intermittent basis

Pierre Le Grange (APS Development Director) has always given us a two year vision for software developments, keeping us fully informed along the way. For instance some years ago he explained the reasons for migration from Access to SQL and on an ongoing basis explained the need to keep our hardware up to date as the software has moved forward.

APS has also provided a reasonable timeframe of support for older versions. As you install newer updates and versions APS doesn't abandon the firms with the older versions. This gives firms a reasonable amount of time to migrate upwards.