



Case study

Watson & Hillhouse



Watson & Hillhouse, founded in 1972, specialises in piling equipment and foundation machinery for commercial construction worldwide. It represents major manufacturers based in Europe and Japan. The company has 32 staff, with sites in Ipswich and Warrington.

The challenge

End-of-life system required manual workarounds and didn't integrate with other software

The finance team at [Watson & Hillhouse](#) was being hampered by its own software. The system didn't integrate with bank feeds, so payment runs involved printing out spreadsheets and rekeying data. Bank reconciliations would take up to two days and sending monthly statements to customers filled another half a day. Getting timely management information was impossible.

"To analyse the data, we had to export multiple Excel files and use our expertise with pivot tables and formulas," says [Peter King](#), Finance and HR Director. "By the time we'd done that analysis, it wasn't real-time information any more."

The team was eventually told the software wouldn't be developed further, except to comply with new legislation – so there could be no question of integration with banking systems. "Because the vendor wasn't willing to do that, we were doing a lot more work. I thought it was silly, there was a lot of risk there and I wasn't comfortable with that," says Peter.

Number of iplicit users: 3

Previous system: Financials (MCS Rental Management)

The solution

Work that took days is done in minutes

The company decided to review operations and finance software at the same time. Its auditor, [Scrutton Bland](#), came up with a shortlist of two finance systems – iplicit and Xero. "Xero was always geared towards smaller trading entities," says Peter. "If we'd gone with it, we'd have needed bolt-on applications for things like expenses, so there'd be at least 4–5 applications to run alongside Xero. When you're relying on 4–5 parties, there's an element of risk that if one app fails or is just developed differently, you negate the benefit of the platform. iplicit would integrate with our ops system, where purchase orders are generated, but otherwise it would be a one-stop shop for everything we needed and it was easy to navigate."

The system was set up by iplicit implementation partner [Eureka Solutions](#). "The team at Eureka was very good," says Peter. "They were patient with me when I was challenging them, they gave us a very good list of user acceptance

testing to go through and stayed in touch for a month after go-live. I can't fault them. The support from iplicit has been very good since going live and it's been nice to have a customer success manager to discuss any concerns."

1 Bank reconciliation:
“Bank reconciliations would take 1.5 to two days a month on our old system,” says Peter. “Now, my colleague invests 5–10 minutes each morning and it’s done. All the sub-ledgers are up to date all the time.”

2 Payment runs:
Watson & Hillhouse has both reduced risk and saved time by [integrating](#) finance with the banking system. Instead of a list of payments being printed out and keyed into the banking software, iplicit produces an export file for uploading to the bank. “The risk has gone and we’re saving at least a day pulling all that information together,” says Peter.

3 Customer statements:
iplicit can now send out statements directly to customers. “That’s no longer half a day’s job – it’s between instant and half an hour,” says Peter.

4 Multiple currencies and VAT regimes:
iplicit has made it easier to account for international customers. Currency revaluations are done at the press of a button, while different VAT rules are applied automatically.

5 Expenses:
[Expenses](#) were previously submitted on handwritten forms with receipts attached. Now, claimants use the mobile app, scanning receipts as they go and hitting “Submit” at the end of the month.

6 Approval workflows:
Purchase invoices are scanned into the system through OCR (optical character recognition), ready for review and approval. “If anyone needs to audit our processes, we can demonstrate exactly what’s occurred with any transaction,” says Peter.

- At least 3.5 days a month saved on finance tasks
- Bank reconciliation reduced from 1.5 or 2 days a month to 5–10 minutes daily
- Risk reduced by integrating finance with banking

“Now that the risks that concerned me with the old system are off the table, it’s given me clear space to think about the things I should be looking at as a finance director – instead of worrying about the transactional data.”

Peter King, Finance and HR Director, Watson & Hillhouse

The outcome

3.5 days a month are freed up for higher-value, strategic work

The benefits to Watson & Hillhouse of the change in system go beyond saving at least 3.5 days a month on everyday tasks. Better reporting and a new transparency over VAT are harder to quantify but have brought big advantages.

“It feels like we’ve got more capacity, more headroom in the week,” says Peter. “We’re able to take a much more proactive approach to managing the finances, chasing debt and so on.

“It’s allowed me to step out of the weeds a little bit and look at the strategic elements of my role. Now that the risks that concerned me with the old system are off the table, it’s given me clear space to think about the things I should be looking at as a finance director – instead of worrying about the transactional data.”

