Ausgrid

Ausgrid revolutionises its workplace health and safety

For electricity providers, training, safety and compliance really matter. The scrutiny from regulators is tough and the "product" - millions of watts of electricity pumping through an expansive power grid - can injure or even kill. It's essential to not only have the right people on the job but also know that their accreditations are on point for the specific work they're doing.

Industry
Utilities

Profile

- The largest distributor of electricity on Australia's east coast
- Founded in 2011

Challenges

- Lack of standardisation and responsiveness in high-risk safety and training

Duration

- Initial build - 24 months
- Support - ongoing

Goal

- A holistic, live and cloudbased system that streamlines afety documentation for qualifications, training and auditing

The Client

As the largest distributor of electricity on Australia's east coast, Ausgrid is a complicated organisation that provides power to approximately 1.8 million people and businesses. Its network of substations, powerlines, power poles and underground cables spans 22,275 square-kilometres.

Starting in Sydney, the network blankets the Hunter Valley, the Central Coast and up into Newcastle – spanning rivers, forests and mountains as it goes. Ausgrid's vision is to become locally and globally recognised as a leader in connecting communities and empowering lives. The focus: reliability, affordability, sustainability.

A key step in pursuing the vision came in December 2016, under a new long-term operating lease wherein the NSW Government, AustralianSuper and IFM Investors took the reins of the business. Under the new ownership system, Ausgrid has maintained its daily dedication to safe and reliable service as it maintains, operates and expands its electricity network.

The Challenge

With infrastructure that supports some 450 schools, 100 hospitals and roughly 25 per cent of NSW's population, it's unsurprising Ausgrid requires its safety and accreditation processes to be powerful, comprehensive and reliable.

The challenge gets steeper, too, given Ausgrid's work with Authorised Service Providers (ASPs). These are service providers who work for external customers who in turn need to work with Ausgrid's infrastructure. Typically, ASPs connect new services to the current grid or undertake augmentation work on Ausgrid's network.

The ASPs range from single worker sole trader companies performing contestable service connection works right through to larger ASP/1 companies with staff on each contestable customer project. Some even employ subcontractors of their own – yet further complicating the processes Ausgrid needs to manage to ensure safety regulations are met all the way down.

One last layer of complexity: due to the nature of ASPs, they must follow a different government accreditation framework from Ausgrid's direct contractors in order to be authorised to work on Ausgrid's network. The overarching problem, then, is ensuring that everyone – employees, contractors and ASPs – are properly registered, trained, accredited and qualified under their own compliance rules to work on Ausgrid's infrastructure.

After the changes of December 2016, it became vividly clear to Ausgrid that the way it had been managing this compliance load – a decentralised array of digital systems and legacy procedures – was not acceptable. And so it launched the so-called Health and Safety Reset initiative. As the issues began to emerge, Ausgrid realised it needed an expert technology partner.
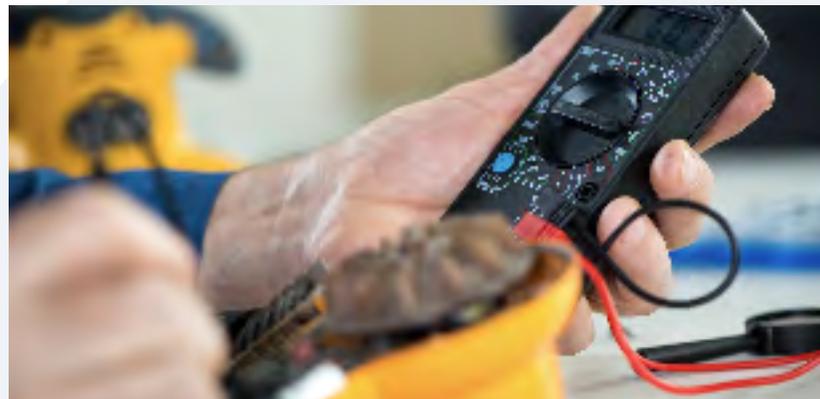
In an effort to rectify this and similar shortfalls, Ausgrid began implementing reviewed safety accreditation processes. However, embedding these into the procurement process was a challenge.

" We just didn't have the system to support it," Murphy says.

" We didn't want to be relying on spreadsheets and people manually typing on desktops to keep them up to date. We needed an end-to-end system to support us."

Avetta was the clear winner with its proven track record helping clients smoothly evolve inconsistent processes, through to helping clients manage everything from licensing insurances to certifications.

The Partnership

Some of Ausgrid's procedural problems became clear early in its Health and Safety Reset. For example, a process review uncovered significant gaps in how safety accreditation for contractors and ASPs was being approached.

Ausgrid's Nelius Murphy, Health and Safety Manager – Network Development and Services, says not always requiring health and safety representatives at the table during tender submittals was just one example of the issues.

" In essence, we weren't asking key health and safety questions before contractors were awarded a piece of work."

"

" I have worked with other organisations and I have seen other providers that think they offer what Avetta offers, but do not quite get it right."

Nelius Murphy, Health and Safety Manager – Network Development and Services, Ausgrid

The Solution

The solution to Ausgrid's problem was multifaceted. It required a holistic approach to certifying, training and managing employees, contractors and ASPs. As Ausgrid's current systems to cope with the knot of competing compliance regimes was not going to survive the Health and Safety Reset, it meant we had to invent a solution from scratch.

Step one was to understand exactly what Ausgrid needed. This discovery period allowed the developer to determine Ausgrid's existing workflows and urgent requirements. It also revealed additional issues that we could help with.

Step two was customising, adapting and implementing our existing SaaS (Software as a Service) platform to suit.

This tool, honed over many years, meant we already had a lot of specialisations in worker management. The strategic configurations and alterations to ensure it met Ausgrid's unique requirements included:

- Specifically configuring questions and answers to correctly profile users
- Updating branding to ensure seamless integration with Ausgrid's existing systems
- Using naming conventions and terminology consistent with Ausgrid's company as a whole
- Linking Ausgrid-specific documentation throughout the process

IMPLEMENTING A TRAINING NEEDS ANALYSIS MATRIX

Ausgrid had an inconsistent approach to ensuring contractors were properly trained and certified. For each contract, work order and division, things were done differently. Now all Ausgrid contractors and ASPs are vetted in a consistent manner.

The results are collated in a matrix that is delivered in an automated, digitised manner. Prospective contractors simply fill out a comprehensive survey and this ensures they hold the right qualifications and training to undertake the work in question.

INTRODUCING A COMPANY PRE-QUALIFICATION PORTAL

As Ausgrid works in a heavily regulated industry, there is a considerable volume of qualification and compliance documentation generated.

Ausgrid is now able to automate much of the checking processes that ensured contractors and ASPs are qualified to undertake work.

The solution includes a Safety Management System (SMS) review where we employ independent auditors to review prospective contractor documentation. Such documentation can include everything from work health and safety certificates to information risk management paperwork.

TRACK AND MANAGE EXISTING CONTRACTORS

The flexibility and scope of the workforce management solution gave Ausgrid the ability to track and maintain the information of all their existing contractors and providers – no matter how specialised or irregular – in one straightforward mobile app. This allows Ausgrid a level of control and visibility not afforded to them before. Where previously checking authorisations involved shuffling papers in an office, now Ausgrid's staff can go into the field, scan a contractor's ID card and instantly see all their relevant information – including contracts, qualifications and certifications.

Unexpected hurdles

While the Ausgrid project was a relatively smooth one, there were still challenges. Foremost, we had to ensure Ausgrid could use the solution on the move. This required the development of an all-new interface that was simpler and tailored to mobile use. The resultant Onsite Mobile App has also enabled Ausgrid to integrate new software seamlessly into field audit instances.

The Result

Ausgrid's solution went into Business as Usual (BAU) mode for some departments in December of 2019. It has been welcomed by Ausgrid employees, contractors and ASPs alike. The scope of the data it is smoothly integrating is best given in numbers:

- There are over 6,000 active workers on the system
- 956 supply and contractor companies are now active
- There are 117 partner roles and 271 competencies being tracked
- The app has over 500 active users
- The business rules page sees between 800 and 1000 views per week
- Over 100 safety management system reviews have been undertaken
- 3,000 inductions have occurred through the system.

Going forward, Avetta is continuing to work with Ausgrid, rolling more departments into the collective to provide a truly holistic solution for the utility as a whole. Next up is Ausgrid's Security Team, with the Learning and Development department to follow.

Through partnering with Avetta on more projects, Ausgrid will be able to increasingly offer its client a more effective and more streamlined way of keeping the lights on for nearly 2 million Australians.