



Award winning airport parking company
Airport Parking & Hotels (APH) operates across three sites – Manchester, Birmingham and Gatwick – and sells on airport and other off-site car parks around the country. APH also offers hotel accommodation and runs alongside sister company Crawley Down Group, which owns a body shop near the Gatwick site and a Shell forecourt.

Challenge

- Accounts functionality was a bolt on to car sales software
- Inability to close purchase and sales ledgers independent of the nominal ledger
- Accounting system could be freely accessed by non-finance team
- Financial data open to errors and omissions wasting hours of time each month

Approach

- Needed a 'pure' accounting package that was easy-to-use from a UK-based vendor APH could trust with great support

Results

- Cut manual invoice re-keying, saving nearly 20 hours per week
- Fast, easy correction of any errors or mistakes made
- Purchase and sales ledgers can be closed independent of the nominal ledger
- Full visibility of all financial data that is accurate and up-to-date
- Staff have been able to reduce their hours due to greater efficiency

Access helps APH gain financial visibility and save 20 hours a month re-keying invoices

“ We now have better controls in place and because you get better visibility with Access, you can check that it's working. We've saved half a person. ”

Julie Ball, Financial Controller, Airport Parking & Hotels and Crawley Down Group

The challenge – an accounting system designed for car sales

Today APH is the larger of two businesses, although it wasn't always that way. Its sister company, Crawley Down Group, used to sell cars across five different franchises so APH piggybacked off its motor trade solution with the accounting functionality bolted on.

“It didn't really account for things properly,” says Julie Ball, financial controller for both businesses. “It was impossible to shut down the purchase and sales ledgers independent of the nominal ledger. It also left the system open to error including unexpected items turning up in the month-end report.” Dealing with the accounting process was painful, particularly given Julie and most of her team were part-time.

“There were lots of quirks with it from that point of view,” comments Julie. “It was designed for the motor trade so it pulled everything that anyone else put on the system. It wasn't just the finance team that were able to access the bought and sales ledgers, which I really didn't like.” Issues ranged from non-finance staff attributing incorrect VAT rates to forgetting to add credits notes. Invoices from the body shop's stand-alone software had to be re-keyed into the accounts package too, creating more opportunity for errors.

The system also wanted to assign fuel purchases to a particular car, “It's a slight snag when you've brought in a whole tanker of fuel for our filling station. That was the sort of problem we encountered with the old system.”

In need of an intuitive accounts package

What Julie wanted was a 'pure finance package'. She attended a software show with a colleague and shortlisted three contenders, including Access. The remit? A straightforward, easy-to-use purchase, sales and nominal ledger system.

Talking to an old colleague confirmed her decision. As the sole accountant in the business, Julie wanted a provider she could trust – someone who would patiently answer her questions, be thorough at every stage and that she could call on when needed.



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Classification: Public

Finding a provider APH could trust

"We've had our fingers burnt with other systems. This was the first one I was really putting in myself and I needed someone that would hold my hand and make me feel confident. Access was really good at that."

A UK-based support team was also essential given previous struggles with outsourced assistance. With Access, Julie found the experience very different. "We've only had to call the support team a handful of times and they've been brilliant, absolutely brilliant. We couldn't have asked for better. We're very glad that we picked Access."

A single source of financial truth

With the system in place the finance team can now close the purchase and sales ledgers independent of the nominal ledger and Julie is looking to increase the number of BACS payments. But perhaps the biggest change is the level of financial control and visibility that Access has brought to the business.

"It's brilliant to be able to see everything on one screen when you look at a transaction: when was it done, who did it, who put it in there, where was it posted to, what was the double entry? I couldn't see any of that before in one place...You can answer a lot of your own questions just by pulling up the right screen."

Greater confidence, efficiency and flexibility

Julie has also found a new love – the Corrections Module! If invoices have been accidentally added to the wrong company accounts or posted to an incorrect nominal ledger code, they can easily be moved or deleted.

It's easier to solve problems when reviewing the accounts too. "Before we weren't quite sure where things were coming from or what had caused a particular increase in a cost. Now it's right there. You can see it and go and investigate it...**Access gives us more confidence in the numbers that we're reporting.**"

Automating invoice processing

All body shop invoices now flow into the accounting system via a simple Excel file - that's 50% of the businesses' total invoices. What used to take 20 hours is now half an hour.

Julie plans to replicate the Excel process when the firm shortly changes its forecourt software. "Although it's only two dozen invoices a month we re-key, we'd rather not," she says. "We've tried and tested it with the body shop so we just need to get the forecourt on board."

The business is also implementing Making Tax Digital with the help of its dedicated account manager and the rest of the Access team. Julie is now keen to continue building on the successes and reap even more benefits from the software moving forward.

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