Forest Holidays is part-owned by the Forestry Commission providing log cabins exclusively on its land across 10 UK locations. The hospitality and leisure company, which has a turnover of £39m and 641 staff, can be found in stunning locations such as Beddgelert, Forest of Dean, Sherwood Forest and Strathyre. First started in Scotland, it now has almost 600 cabins for hire.

Challenge

- Time-consuming to complete management account.
- No integrated purchase order system.
- Lack of visibility over company spend
- Manual expenses lead to errors and additional processing.
- Painful process to get information in and out of the system.
- Software was not intuitive making it difficult to use.

Approach

- Needed an integrated accounting system with more robust purchase order and invoicing software which included electronic capture and expense management – all of which would be intuitive and easy to use.

Results

- Processing three times the number of invoices without increasing staff numbers.
- Saved one headcount by going paperless and eliminated physical document storage.
- Reduced time taken to generate. management accounts from 10 minutes to under 30 seconds.
- Saved staff time submitting expense claims with easy-to-use app.
- Eliminated laborious task of checking expenses and chasing for approvals.
- Audits are more manageable, with all data easily accessible in the system.

Forest Holidays increases invoice processing three-fold with no additional staff – and reduces management accounts to under 30 seconds

> *We moved from something that was really quite clunky and awful to something that's slicker, more intuitive, and more user-friendly.*

- Eric Green, Commercial Controller for Forest Holidays

The wrong fit for the business

Forest Holidays found its previous system a struggle. The business was previously run in partnership with the Caravan and Camping Club and the Forestry Commission, using Great Plains which made it easy for consolidation purposes but it wasn't a great fit. "It was a matter of convenience. However, everything from uploading journals to exporting data was hard work," says Eric Green, commercial controller for Forest Holidays.

The purchase order (PO) module wasn't integrated to the ledgers, invoices couldn't be matched and anyone could raise a PO. This made it extremely difficult for the finance team to determine expenditure and pay incoming invoices. Coupled with this, creating management accounts proved difficult and none of the interfaces spoke to each other.

Their paper-based, manual expense process was time-consuming and laborious too. "We used to do everything on an Excel template which relied on us going through and making sure that everything was right – and being a spreadsheet over time things go awry."

A more seamless experience

Since moving to the Access system more than six years ago, the business is now enjoying greater productivity and efficiency. "The thing I love about the software is all the links between the nominal ledger, Excel and the management accounts. We can generate the management accounts in under 30 seconds whereas before it would take us almost 10 minutes to generate. So that's where it has saved me a lot of time."

Eric continues, "The software is so intuitive to use and it has really linked all the relevant pieces in our company together to ensure a seamless flow of information.

Processing more invoices, faster, by going paperless

Today the finance team knows exactly what purchase orders and invoices have been matched, accrued or paid at any point in time. And it has allowed them to take on more work with ease.

"Adopting the document capture module has allowed us to go paperless and has helped us save one headcount in the purchase ledger department. We're processing at least three times more invoices but we haven't had to add more headcount to achieve this."

It has also meant that the dispersed team can access the documents wherever they're based. "That's one of the best things about it. No matter where you are, you can get in. You can see exactly what the invoice is for. Come audit, it's heaven because you can email an electronic copy or call it up on screen. They're happy. We're happy."

As a result, the audit process is more manageable, time has been saved and invoices are no longer misplaced. "There are audit days we've gained because we're not trying to pile through 15 million files looking for an invoice to pull out for the audit – and then forgetting to put it back."

The business also no longer needs its 10 m x 20 m of warehouse space to store financial records. "Now we don't keep any because we scan them in. The vast majority of those were purchase invoices. It has changed the way we do things dramatically."

Taking the hard work out of expenses

Another major success was introducing expense management software. Initially trialled by their project build team, it allowed them to quickly photograph receipts with their mobile device and file the expense claim remotely. It proved a huge hit. "It was great because they were advocates for the rest of the business," says Eric. "You don't need training on it, it's that simple to use. The best piece of software for impact on the business."

"It means you can do it any time, any place. You can do it in a way that allows you to literally capture it as you go and then batch it up into one expense claim. It's absolutely brilliant and having the ability to also upload the credit cards to systems as well is an absolute godsend. It saves so many headaches for us."

Compliance is also easier with policy changes applied globally so everyone automatically uses the latest template and a mileage calculator keeps costs down. Any policy exceptions are flagged for the person approving the claim.

"It's all that good stuff that's embedded into the expenses that's saved us processing time. It's also saved us the hassle of trying to chase people down to one, get the expenses in and two, actually get them approved."

Eric concludes, "I would really recommend the Access team and the software. It's an intuitive software backed by a good support network. Of course, I would say that you should have a very clear idea of what you need as the software is so easily configurable.

I have a great relationship with our account manager who knew and understood our business, and he would recommend what would work best for our company."

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The Access Group is a leading provider of integrated business management software. Our portfolio spans ERP, finance, HR, Payroll, Recruitment, warehousing, business intelligence, professional service automation and manufacturing.

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The Access Group is one of the fastest growing UK software developers. Our on-going commitment to excellence, customers and employees, has also placed us among the UK's top employers.

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