

HAVEN HOLIDAY HOMES RELAXES WITH IBM COGNOS 8



MULTI-USERS CAUSE CHAOS WITH BUDGETING PROCESS

Haven Holiday Homes is one of Britain's leading leisure brands. Its finance department, run from Hemel Hempstead, liaises with heads of departments at its parks, and has deployed IBM Cognos 8 Planning to remove errors and simplify processes in the budgeting and forecasting procedure.

Haven, until recently, used Analyst Financials, an Excel add-in which takes information from spreadsheets and converts it into a database which can then be used to run reports. The problems with this system appear to have been manifold, including consolidation issues; control issues with users working off line, some using older versions; and complications from individual errors - because data had to be collated from 36 separate sites it was a massive task collecting all the separate data entries. If changes needed to be made, 36 different files had to be checked and updated and then tested again, and still occasionally other errors would appear, causing the whole process to start once again. These problems meant that Tim Ware, Finance Planning Manager at Haven, was not confident in the numbers. He says: 'we struggled with adjustments, and also came adrift where we sometimes had the wrong information. All these factors combined made implementing a new system essential.'

COGNOS INTRODUCES PREFERRED PARTNER TO HAVEN

Having decided it was time for Haven to consider other options

rather than Excel for budgeting and forecasting, Tim did some research and contacted IBM Cognos for a possible solution. As winner of the 'Number One IBM Cognos Partner' award for the fifth year running, Inca Software was introduced by IBM Cognos as their preferred partner for Haven to work with. As well as IBM Cognos, Haven also looked at several other well known budgeting tools, but decided that overall the IBM Cognos package offered by Inca, and that the features available were ideal for what they needed. Tim says, 'IBM Cognos was more sophisticated but at the same time appeared to offer us a fairly straightforward budgeting procedure'.

In January 2008, once the other potential budgeting tools had been discarded as possibilities, Haven chose IBM Cognos Analyst and IBM Cognos 8 Contributor to fulfil their requirements. Tim and a colleague attended the essential IBM Cognos training course later that Spring, and by April were ready for the initial implementation period. This took about two weeks, where Haven's old system was recreated (to include the planned improvements) in IBM Cognos. By May, Haven had a working model to use and have since, along with their dedicated Inca consultant, been making improvements, tweaking sections and getting feedback from the different company sites that use it. They have also imported the employees and wages information into the system.



CASE STUDY: HAVEN HOLIDAY HOMES

KEY FEATURES:

- Use Dream as General Ledger System alongside IBM Cognos
- Consolidation of 37 separate spreadsheets - One Version of the Truth
- Eliminates spreadsheet errors
- Enables in depth data analysis
- Confidence in process by non-finance end users
- Ownership gives control to Haven

“ Instead of having offices each with several versions of data, we now have one version of the truth ”

CHANGES SINCE IBM COGNOS 8 IMPLEMENTATION

Tim has noted vast improvements in the budgeting cycle since implementing IBM Cognos 8. He points out the ease of use, consolidation of data, and the effortlessness of making multiple corrections; 'essentially we can now have a view of the data as and when it is filled in by the end users', he says, 'instead of having offices each with several versions of data, we now have one version of the truth', Tim concludes. Another related benefit is the option to have protected cells so that formulae can't be overwritten, Tim comments; 'previously without this option, if something was overwritten it would make everything fall over'.

With the new system in place, Haven re-issues the budget modelling every 12 weeks, and improves it each time. 'Eventually we'll have an all singing, all dancing model,' says Tim. He continues, 'we now have much more buy-in into the budgeting process from other departments. People review their work before sending it to us which means Finance now has time to look at the results rather than spending time collating it. We are now able to actually challenge the figures and use it to drive our business forward'. The process is also much quicker, 'in the past we had to constantly extend our deadlines and keep calling departments to find out what was going on. Now we can keep to the time line and monitor people's progress on their data, and see exactly where they are to ensure

everyone works on the reports.' Tim also says, 'before we wouldn't even have the time to do that, let alone help them through the process. Instead we were always checking and fixing the files.'

One of the greatest benefits of IBM Cognos is the time it frees to concentrate on analysing data. Tim and his finance team now export data into other reporting systems, conduct weekly reporting, and do a full set of accounts every week. Tim comments, 'this can now incorporate information which before would have taken a week just to get ready. In the past we had financial information which was basically redundant because we couldn't capture it efficiently, now that we can capture it everything flows together with great ease,' he concludes.

SOFTWARE SATISFACTION WITH INCA & IBM COGNOS 8

One of the most important factors in choosing a new budgeting and forecasting tool was ensuring ease of use for everyone involved. 'All of the non-finance people who send us reports have found it easy to use. They can also see it's a vast improvement on what they were using before, and I've had nothing but positive feedback about what we've done with IBM Cognos and Inca', Tim remarks.

“ Whenever we have needed Inca's advice or help they have been extremely willing to suggest improvements and possibilities. Inca's Helpdesk in particular have gone out of their way to quickly and efficiently deal with any queries ”

It is Inca's standard practice to give their customers ownership of their model so that they have the freedom to use IBM Cognos to their own specifications. Tim states, 'we definitely have ownership of the model, and I wouldn't have it any other way - it just wouldn't work for a company like Haven'. He goes on to say, 'however, whenever we have needed Inca's advice or help they have been extremely willing to suggest improvements and possibilities. Inca's Helpdesk in particular have gone out of their way to quickly and efficiently deal with any queries'.

So what next for Haven and IBM Cognos 8? Well, they hope to expand their processes in IBM Cognos to include other areas of the budget, and plan to start improving their forecasting procedure.

