Case study

SmartStream smartens up its global HR

SmartStream is typical of many companies that have expanded globally – it lacked a central, consistent view of business across the globe.

SmartStream

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Challenges

People may be pretty similar wherever you go, but the legal, employment and financial regulations surrounding them definitely are not.

This posed a headache for SmartStream Global HR Director David Porter: the company had a global workforce, but it didn't have a global HR system.

SmartStream provides trading software and services to more than 70 of the world's top 100 banks and other major financial institutions.

It's an organization with a global reach, employing over 550 employees across 20 countries – and that reach is extending. It became apparent that its existing HR systems, which in most regions were run on Excel spreadsheets, were not giving the HR team the visibility into its global workforce it needed.

"We operate in multiple countries and we just got to the point, where, as we expanded, we needed to get one consolidated platform. We couldn't continue to manage local arrangements on an individual basis in multiple locations. We had to achieve economies of scale, standardize and have one system."

David Porter,
Global HR Director
SmartStream

There are roughly half a dozen HR people around the globe, as well as finance people who also perform various HR duties, in some of the smaller offices. It was difficult to get a consolidated picture of the information from these far-flung sources.

Not only was the data in spreadsheets, but each person inputting the data had their own way of doing it. This information then had to be collated and coordinated with the UK's automated HR solution. The whole process, according to Porter, was heavy on manual input and lacking consistency:

"You need to have a set of definitions or a set of rules so that you can be confident when figures are quoted that they meant the same thing. You need to have standard definitions in order that things work. Actually getting the data in one consistent format could be difficult. It could be recorded in different ways in different countries."

Solution

Sage Business Cloud People "was in our sweet spot", comments Porter, because its HRMS could meet SmartStream's need for global coverage and handle all the differences in languages, currencies and employment regulations that entailed. This combination of global and local capabilities was key, says Porter:

"It needs to do as much as possible on a central basis but it needs to be able to recognize where local arrangements have to be different, and the system needs to cope with all of that."

Sage People took the time to understand the business and work through its processes and was unfazed by SmartStream's desire for a fast implementation time. As

Porter puts it:

"We're a busy business and can't afford to have prolonged projects."

As a cloud-based system, Sage Business Cloud People could give the company flexibility to scale-up easily and to provide far better support for its mobile workforce. Porter explains:

"Our employees operate around the world and the fact that they're able to do some HR transactions on the move is enormously appealing. We have lots of people who travel extensively for work and a cloud based system gives us the flexibility to do what we need to do."

The implementation was broken down into two phases. During phase one, high- level key data and reports were collected globally.

The company is currently in phase two, rolling out self-service and a collaboration portal country by country. Employees can update their holiday information or update their address or bank details, for example. Managers have more visibility into their teams. The UK and US are already up and running, and Asia-Pac is to follow shortly.

The benefits

It is early days, but the HR team is already beginning to see results. Even something as simple as being able to see an organizational chart provides staff with far more visibility into the organization. The most important benefit is that the HR team is now able to focus on more strategic issues instead of being bogged down in admin. As Porter says:

"This allows us to spend more time on higher value things and less time chasing data up and down columns and spreadsheets. It moves us away from paper-based processes and Excel spreadsheets and on to something that's more technologically advanced and more efficient."

Group HR Manager, Tom Sutherland, who worked closely on the implementation, adds:

"It takes just 20 minutes to half an hour to provide reports, while it used to take probably a day and a half to two days to pull it together before. We have a far better handle on where people are in the business and finance feels happier with the information they are provided with for forecasting."

The company is now working on creating payroll interfaces to its multiple payroll providers around the globe and looking further ahead, hopes to be able to include talent management and performance management into the system.

It's been a fairly smooth ride so far and user acceptance has been high, but Porter and his team have one key piece of advice for any organization embarking on a similar global roll-out: make communication a priority..

"We did a lot of Skype calls and Webex meetings, but we realized that you need to see people face to face for people to feel connected and involved."

Tom Sutherland
Group HR Manager, SmartStream