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telephone: 01491 845 710
fax: 01491 591 122
web: www.cardinale.uk.com

Scott Brownrigg + Turner

Project and contact management through the Internet made easy with FileMaker

Scott Brownrigg + Turner is an architectural practice with three main offices in the UK and a number of associated overseas offices. It specialises in undertaking large projects in the commercial office, hotel and leisure, residential and distribution sectors. IT systems have always been key to processes at SBT, and are involved at nearly all stages of projects. However, over the years, this developed into a cumbersome array of legacy applications. These solutions were not accessible by all, and owing to the range of systems, it proved to be difficult to keep them up to date. There was also the issue of training, as users needed to be proficient in at least five applications to use all of the various systems necessary for project management.

SBT came to Cardinale, a partner member of the FileMaker Solutions Alliance, to develop an integrated information solution that could be accessed by everyone, encapsulating previous stand-alone solutions for client, project and marketing information. Ideally SBT wanted the solution to be used through a standard web browser, which would be platform independent. A wide area network had been installed across the offices, so the majority of the hardware was in place; now the software solution needed to be developed.

Cardinale developed a bespoke FileMaker system, specifically designed to facilitate project management. The system connects all information relevant to a project, including a project profile, contact sheets, project history, and makes them accessible to the whole team. The system also tracks deadlines, and keeps an audit trail of all records, so it can be confirmed when they were last modified and by whom. This quality assurance layer helps SBT ensure the integrity of the data – of paramount importance to their customer relations.

"FileMaker's ease of use makes it perfect for this kind of set up, where users need to just sit down and use the system, without the need for extensive training," said Guy Laschinger. "And the power and flexibility of FileMaker means that simplicity for users doesn't come at the cost of functionality; we have been able to build a solution with a high degree of complexity, yet which is completely user-friendly."

The system has been customised to incorporate all necessary SBT templates, from drawing issue sheets to survey checklists. Cardinale also included a resource image library in the solution, so any images relevant to a particular project can also be accessed. For marketing purposes, a contact and lead tracking tool, which organises contacts into recallable, fully editable groups was also incorporated, enabling mail shots and e-shots to be precisely targeted. Administration tools such as diaries, timesheets and expenses are also managed via the FileMaker system.

southfield house
24 greys road
henley – on – thames
oxfordshire, RG9 1RY

The functionality of the new system enables client contact information and project information to be interwoven, and also provides the ability to integrate archive information from past projects, specifications and tenders, which has helped SBT target and value future bidding projects more accurately.

Crucially for SBT, the database is accessible to three types of user: first to the administrators of the system who need to generate reports. These office-based users are able to use the solution directly via FileMaker. The second, and largest group of users connect via a web browser, either from the office or remotely. SBT also have a mobile workforce without access to the web. Through the FileMaker solution, these users can download a snapshot of data when they are in the office to their laptop, update it remotely off site and then synchronise their data back to the master system once they are back in the office.

John Child, Divisional Director of SBT said, "The solution has allowed us to combine the simplicity of a point and click web interface with our core project information"

The solution has enabled SBT to greatly streamline their operations. By working from one integrated system without the need to update a number of databases, staff are able to reduce the time spent on administration, and give more focus to projects. By providing all SBT's Divisions access to the same database, communication across offices has become more productive. The solution also formed a core part of their intranet system, which is seen as key to their future IT development. This solution is now mission critical to SBT as it umbrellas all the past information tools, and has helped them to reduce the overheads on all the separate previous applications.

"Unifying our systems into one solution has dramatically improved our efficiency and our communication throughout our company locations," said John Child.

"The solution has given SBT the tool they needed to eradicate their past IT challenges, and from their use and knowledge of FileMaker they now have the ability to further develop and grow the use of the system internally," said Guy Laschinger at Cardinale.