



Charles Darwin University Talks Change Inertia in the Transition from Manual to Electronic Procurement

Change is hard, but it is inevitable. After decades of doing something a certain way, making the jump into uncharted waters can leave many people apprehensive, but those who make the leap inevitably find themselves better for it in the long run – and in some cases, the change can be seamless. Charles Darwin University (CDU) had to make that leap a little over 15 years ago, after deciding to overhaul its procurement practices.

Charles Darwin University is a dual sector University with eight campuses and vocational training centres located across the Northern Territory. It also recently opened CDU Sydney and CDU Melbourne. CDU provides training at 170 sites across the NT in remote Indigenous communities, making it one of the most diverse universities in Australia. It employs 1,200 staff and has a student population of more than 22,000, which are drawn locally, nationally and from overseas.

Mick Lihou is the Contracts Manager in the Office of Strategic Procurement at CDU. He has been involved with the majority of the changes the University has made to procurement practices in the past 20 years – including the shift from manual to electronic procurement.

"The system worked back then," he said. "There was a method to how everything was done, and it was

almost universal. It was time-consuming and it was cumbersome, but it was a system that worked. If I had to use that system now I could use it and it would – eventually – get the job done."

The first computer system installed at the university was the e-procurement solution from Australasian company, TenderLink – and the University has been happily using it ever since.

"Change is inevitable, and with any change you expect some amount of pain. More often than not, it can be extremely disruptive," said Lihou. "But the change to the TenderLink system was the least painful experience I have had in my professional life."

"TenderLink's support was first class. After three or four calls with their support team, using the system became second nature. The move was seamless.

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Contracts Manager
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"In fact, TenderLink's support remains first class; they had it right way back then, and they've still got it right today."

The TenderLink solution made the tendering process extremely efficient, saving the University an incredible amount of time. Meanwhile, if issues of probity and transparency arise, the entire process is documented online and any discrepancies are easily identified.

"While some could argue that an e-procurement portal solution offers the same outcomes as the manual process still used by many organisations today, this doesn't factor in the savings which accrue from the streamlined and standardised work-flows built into our software. With our solution, you get to the end game quicker and more efficiently," said Darrin Stollznow, TenderLink's NSW-based Australasian Business Development Manager.

"The efficiency of e-tendering and e-procurement speaks for itself but, increasingly, organisations struggle to change from the status quo. The key to dealing with that inertia is finding a company with a customer service team that will assist in the transition every step of the way."

A solution that works, backed by first-class support.

"Whoever designed this program made it easy to use and logical, and it just works. Anyone can create a software program, but TenderLink provides support that, in my experience, is second to none," Lihou said. "You are being looked after; it's a service-driven organisation and they back their product. You hear and see advertisements from companies claiming they back their product, but TenderLink is the organisation that actually lives it and delivers."

The University is so happy with the solution that it will use TenderLink's e-procurement tool for all its tendering from 2014.

"I don't want to overstate it, but TenderLink takes ownership of any issues, its people are friendly and if they can't help me – which is very rare – they have someone who can help call me within half an hour."

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