

Devonport City Council Dives Into e-Procurement and Surfaces With Across-the-Board Efficiency



There have to be benefits associated with any change, otherwise there'd be no reason to travel off the well-worn path into the great unknown of a new process or, even more dauntingly, a whole new system.

The old ways have their frustrations, their pitfalls - but we know the old ways inside out. They're second nature to us, and they work. So the idea of changing tack when the route we are on works requires a leap of faith.

But when there's overwhelming evidence that change will bring about more efficiency, and therefore lower overall cost, then the rationale for change is hard to ignore. Such is the case when converting a manual task into a digital process. This is happening every day in almost every organisation. Those who go through the transition invariably - and overwhelmingly - wonder why they didn't make the change sooner.

Devonport City Council made the transition from a manual, paper-based procurement process to a digital, e-Procurement solution back in July 2014. It hasn't looked back since.

While the municipality of Devonport is small, at just 116 square kilometres, it's fair to say it's the island state's heartbeat. The City of Devonport and its 26,000 residents make up the city which serves as the major port for Tasmania, and the municipality produces more than 40 per cent of the state's vegetable crops.

In 2014 the council began using TenderLink for any projects over \$100,000 and for the occasional smaller quotation. As is the case with most

transitions, there was understandable trepidation about using the new technology and divesting the council of the tried-but-true manual process.

"Council were a little bit apprehensive when we first moved our procurement processes online, but once we introduced the new technology, we soon realised we should have been using this years ago," a spokesperson for the council said. "Prior to the introduction of an e-Procurement solution, Council used to upload tender documents to our website and anyone could go on there, register and download the documents. But that was quite an onerous job to manage from end-to-end, especially once the submissions began to roll in. We'd have to manage every submission, record

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when we received them and manually send out any addenda we needed to issue.

“But with the e-Procurement system, we can just upload the documents to our e-Procurement portal ourselves and from there the task is all automated. We can select a date and time when they’re made available to the public. In addition, any submissions automatically go into our records system in a matter of minutes, rather than hours.”

Dean Armstrong, TenderLink’s Victoria-based Business Development Manager, believes that this re-realisation of internal independence and the administrative time savings are two of the main benefits valued by councils when moving to a specialised, built-for-purpose e-Procurement solution.

“With the TenderLink system, you get to call the shots and all the grunt work that comes with a typical procurement process - the scanning, the record-keeping and the monitoring of incoming and outgoing notices and submissions - is taken care of,” said Armstrong. “Because our system is purpose-built, the issue of meeting probity requirements is automated, as every download or upload, or notification update, is time-stamped and recorded for audit purposes.”

A larger pool and more time to breathe - for everyone

The key to securing the best submissions for any given purchasing requirement is competition, and an omni-channel approach reaching targeted audiences is clearly better than placing all your eggs in one basket. With the TenderLink e-Procurement solution, not only can organisations improve the operational side of the tendering process, they gain access to an ever-growing supplier audience spanning 63 industry categories.

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Thus, the task of casting the net as wide as possible is made easy through automation.

“Council advertises their tenders in the local papers as required, and those ads simply direct suppliers to our e-Procurement portal where they can access the documents and even submit their responses,” the spokesperson said. “Since moving to an e-Procurement solution, we have definitely seen an increase in the number of submissions received for certain projects, especially those associated with professional services.

“When you require, say, an architect, you tend to get a wider cross-section of responses. This is because the tender advertisements are sent out to any architect firm registered within our own e-Procurement portal, as well as to TenderLink’s wider architect supplier base across Australia. We often ask that the successful submitter has an office in Tasmania, and that may lead to a joint venture with a local firm.”

The common fear when casting that wide net is that you tend to catch a lot more work. In the old days prior to e-Procurement, more submissions meant more paperwork, and a lot more time at the fax machine or the photocopier.

“You could have 100 pages per submission, maybe more, and every page has to be scanned in and correctly filed,” the spokesperson said. “It could take up a lot of time, but with our new system now in place, any submission automatically goes from our digital tender box straight into our records system in a matter of minutes.

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