

James Cook University Goes the Extra Mile with Dual-Toolset e-Procurement Approach



It's easy to rely on the standard model of how things are done, especially when that method is a legislative requirement and has been effective in the past. In procurement, a perfect example is combining the use of free Government-provided toolsets and localised print advertisements to publicise your requirements to a prospective supplier audience. But some organisations are stepping outside the box, seeking additional methods to get the procurement job done. Such is the case with James Cook University.

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With campuses in Cairns, Townsville and Singapore, as well as several smaller study centres in Mount Isa, Thursday Island and Mackay, the University has a significant footprint in Queensland and abroad, and ranks as one of the world's leading institutions for tropics research.

Gerrard Milham is the procurement adviser for Facilities and Construction at James Cook University. In any given year, his department may prepare and go to market with about 12 large construction and facilities management-related tenders. The University's own procurement

guidelines stipulate that projects of \$200,000 and above must be publicly advertised. Further, as a Queensland-based Government agency, the University is required to post all public tender notices to the Queensland Department of Housing and Public Works' QTenders website.

But James Cook University has chosen to take an extra step, linking all notices posted on QTenders back to its TenderLink e-Procurement portal.

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Darrin Stollznow, Business Development Manager for TenderLink, sees a growing trend towards a dual-toolset approach through combining the use of public and commercial e-Procurement solutions.

"Because we specialise in the public sector, we know that many of our clients across Australia and New Zealand have access to Government-provided solutions and, in many cases, are required to use them by law. We respect that," he said, "but we also know that, in some cases, organisations are looking for more. James Cook University is a perfect example, as are the many Councils in New Zealand who combine our solution with the Government-provided GETS service.

"Some organisations want additional functionality, a different user interface, or are looking to engage a broader supplier base. For others, it's simply a matter of preference."

Ease ensures competition

The shift from a manual, paper-based process brings with it obvious benefits to the organisation going to market for goods and services. But what is often not considered when an organisation shifts to an e-Procurement solution is how simple the process becomes on the other side of the tendering equation: for suppliers looking to submit responses.

"In the past, potential submitters had to receive the documents by post and it could be a time-exhaustive and inefficient process," said Milham. "But now it's all electronic and organisations that might have been reluctant in the past can at least view the documents and receive any addenda quickly and easily.

"As a result, we are seeing more people submitting tenders and definitely seeing more people download the documents from the TenderLink portal, because it is just so easy to do now. The amount of time saved using e-Tendering is a major benefit for both parties."

Simplicity and familiarity lighten procurement workload

While it is hard to put an actual number to the amount of time saved when adopting an e-Procurement solution, one only has to look at the sheer weight of work inherent in the manual paper-based procurement process to see just how exhaustive it can be.

"We had a tender close the other day with 20 responses. Under the old process you'd have 20 packages to photocopy and if you needed to send out an addendum, that's 20 additional packages going out," said Milham. "Then you'd have 30-40 queries via phone and we'd have to print 20 sets of addenda, post them, then you have the cost of postage... "Just imagine the time saved, now that it's all electronic and automated."

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