



BROWN & CO

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Access financial management software eliminated the need for Brown & Co to run 34 separate reports per month for different income streams, saving 5-6 hours per month on a single task.

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Brown & Co is a leading provider of agency, professional & consultancy services across the whole range of rural, commercial & residential property, agriculture & the environment.

From a growing network of offices throughout East Anglia, the Midlands and Yorkshire & Humber region as well as internationally, they combine a high level of specialist technical expertise with experience and local knowledge. The firm has a real commitment to build strong, proactive and long-term relationships with both corporate & private clients, for whom they always strive to deliver the best results and total satisfaction.

Brown & Co use suite of Access software to bring consistent processes to their diverse business units, improving efficiency and visibility.

The right fit – software and support

With impressive growth led by mergers and acquisitions, Brown & Co found that across their business they had a myriad of different systems and ways of doing things, as well as a heavy reliance on paper-based records and processes. Brown & Co's Commercial Operations Director Alton Nutile explains, 'Our need from a software system was twofold. Our first priority was to align our business processes. The second one was to cut down on paper and look to become more efficient.'

As Alton explained, Brown & Co explored a number of software providers, 'Other providers we looked at didn't align with our ethos, our culture and our size. That said we didn't want to work with anyone too small, as we wanted something off the shelf. We were looking for software that we could tailor to what we want while still having that best practise approach. And it felt like Access were neither too big nor too small and were really aligned with what we wanted.'

Throughout the implementation of the software, and since going live, Alton has found working with Access to be a real partnership. He adds, 'Through the implementation, it was a really collaborative approach. We felt appreciated and looked after. Since then the product roadmaps and insight sessions put on by Access have been great. It's been beneficial to talk to the product managers in different areas because it's always useful to know that, before we start thinking of building something ourselves, it's on the horizon for Access. We've also given feedback on some of the new apps Access have built before they were even released. It's nice to have that input into the future.'

- Reduced unnecessary admin load within the financial team
- Reduced headcount requirement in admin roles, allowing that resource to be redeployed to revenue building roles
- Mitigated the risk of manual errors creeping in when duplicating information across multiple systems
- Brought consistent frameworks and processes to previously siloed business streams
- Created a single point of truth, giving employees timely, relevant data at their fingertips
- Given management a comprehensive, real-time view of operations across the business,
- Providing crucial data insights for management to identify where they can make tangible improvements

A consistent approach that saves time, prevents manual errors and gives a single source of truth

Being a diverse business, Brown & Co have thirty-four different income streams. Before implementing the new software, the accountancy team had to run thirty-four separate reports each month, and then manually collate that into a master spreadsheet to get a consolidated view of the group's results. Since introducing Financials, the team has seen a reduction in both the potential for manual errors in their results and the time taken to create them. Alton comments, 'Those reports took our assistant accountant four or five hours every month. Now it's a two- or three-minute job. With a click of the button, we can refresh the report and see all that information straightaway. It's fantastic. So much so, that we've now taken the time to stop and take stock. And where we've created some spare capacity in the finance team, we can now do more of the analytical stuff that we should be doing instead of the administrative stuff.'

And this is not the only example of time-saving within the business. The efficiencies Brown & Co have gained since introducing Financials are benefitting the finance team and positively impacting the wider business. 'Because the systems talk to each other, our teams are also saving time not having to enter data into multiple separate systems. So much so that we've reduced our headcount requirement in those administrative areas, and been able to re-allocate that resource into client-facing roles, reinvesting in the revenue building side of the business which is really beneficial.'

With so many diverse business units and income streams, one of the most significant benefits has been to create consistency in the data and processes across the business. 'Using Financials doesn't mean everyone has to work in the same way. If I'm a land agent, and I'm selling farms I'm going to do that in a very different way to my colleague in another office who might be the managing agent of a commercial property or preparing architectural drawings for a new housing development. We give every team the tools to do what we need them to do, in an efficient way. The software doesn't dictate to us how we work. It just provides us with a solid, consistent framework to do what we do, which is what we needed to achieve one single source of truth.'



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From a management perspective [having financials] means that you have that information that you need to identify where you can make tangible improvements going forward.

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Using Access has positively impacted on how many teams across Brown & Co operate, helping the company set themselves up to attract and retain the best talent across the industry. 'As a business, we want to attract the best talent, whether they be graduates that we've brought in through our links with agricultural colleges and architectural universities, or the best in the field from competitors. We want to attract these people to our business. Previously, putting a paper form in front of them to book their holidays or book their client expenses was embarrassing. Now, we've got Access Workspace set as our Internet homepage, so when employees log on to their computer, the Access Workspace homepage comes up, and from there, they do everything in their day. Book holiday, record any sickness, claim expenses, record time, look at project profitability and so on. It's a more modern way of thinking, and it helps us attract better people.'

Having this single and consistent data source that encapsulates activity across Brown & Co's operations has been a massive benefit from a management perspective. The management team can quickly and easily get a comprehensive view of activity across the business and make decisions based on accurate, up-to-date information. Alton explains, 'We can review the business not just based on gut feeling, but based on tangible information. When it comes to project management and looking at how people manage our projects and how effective they are with those projects, there's no doubt in the data because it's in one place. It exists consistently. Whereas before it didn't even exist. From a management perspective, it means that you have that information that you need to identify where you can make tangible improvements going forward.'

Responding to the pandemic

Soon after their implementation, like others across the world, the teams at Brown & Co had to make rapid adjustments to their working practices in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Alton explains how without Access software, Brown & Co would have struggled immensely with this transition, 'We went live on Monday, March the 2nd of 2020 and then three weeks later, exactly, all of a sudden we're all sent home from work. If we hadn't had gone live with Access when we had, we don't think we'd have just kept up our invoicing as quick as we had done. The old system we had based on printed invoices, literally stamp it, sign it and code it, then passed to the accounts team. It just wouldn't have happened. We wouldn't have kept the cash coming in.'

Thanks to its Access software Brown & Co have maintained cash flow and essential business operations throughout the pandemic. Alton adds, 'The fact that we could go live and three weeks later going into lockdown paper free and with a remote system, has been the biggest benefit. We've managed to continue our business in the face of moving to remote working and the economic challenges that we see in our world. It was one less challenge that we had to deal with as a business when moving to remote working because we had the system in place.'

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Software that offers continual opportunities for growth and ongoing improvements

One of the things that has most appealed to Brown & Co about working with Access is the software as a service cloud-based model. In taking new software, Brown & Co were looking to move away from on-premise software provision that required manual updates, which happened infrequently. Alton explains, 'One of the things we had wrong with our previous software was we had it installed twenty years ago, and it didn't change much from there. Now, because we have software as a service, we can see it being developed all the time. I like to see improvements and developments as they come out and know that it's moving forward. As we move forward as a company, we want the software we use to move forward as well. I think that's a benefit of working with a company like Access. They're not a huge company that does an update once a year and doesn't keep pace with the new demands on an ERP system.'

Access Financials has already provided considerable benefits for Brown & Co, saving time, reducing manual data errors, and providing a comprehensive and real-time view of operations. With this now embedded in day-to-day operations, the company is now looking to utilise the software's rich functionality further to benefit the business. Alton says, 'Access already gives us a slick way of collecting job costs and invoicing those job costs. But there is more we want to do going forward, and we can already see that the system will enable us to do that. The next stage is to use better analysis of our data.'





As well as exploring the further potential Financials provides, Brown & Co are also looking at the breadth of other software solutions offered by Access, delivered through Access Workspace. Alton explains why Brown & Co are excited to explore these additional features to give their employees an even more comprehensive and consistent software experience for all their business needs. 'The beauty of what Access can do is behind the scenes. You can have your absence management on there, you can put someone's annual leave straight into their timesheet, with the expenses module you can put the costs directly into a project and more. That's what we need. And we're looking at bringing in more functionality, we haven't got HR, people management, learning management or legal yet, but we want to look at bringing those in too. We want them to look and feel exactly the same as what we already have because it helps the user experience. It doesn't become a massive change for the employee to stomach; it's just another icon in the same environment that they already know how to use. It means they can still go to one place for everything without having to access multiple systems. That's what we want to give our people. We want them to be given information at their fingertips as opposed to having to waste time searching for that information.'

Find out more about how Access financials could help your business

About The Access Group:

The Access Group has been recognised in The Sunday Times Tech Track 100 in 2019 and is a leading provider of business software to mid-sized UK organisations. It helps more than 32,000 customers across commercial and not-for-profit sectors become more productive and efficient. Its innovative Access Workspace cloud platform transforms the way business software is used, giving every employee the freedom to do more.

Established in 1991, The Access Group, with an enterprise valuation of over £1 billion, employs more than 2,300 staff.

For more information about The Access Group, visit: <https://www.theaccessgroup.com/>

