

Case Study

The Savoy, London

Client

Founded in 1996, Chorus Group are specialists in high quality refurbishment and fitting out. They operate within the commercial offices, hotels & leisure, public sector & retail sectors, covering planning, design and construction. Chorus is part of the Byrne Group, one of the UK's fastest growing companies in the project management and construction services industry.

Project

The Savoy, one of London's most famous five-star hotels, is undergoing a full refurbishment. Internally, its 267 guestrooms are being renovated and a 16-room Royal Suite is being added. Nineteen new lifts are being installed and its public and back-of-house areas are being refurbished. In the Thames Foyer, the hotel's afternoon tea venue, a glass roof and a specially built conservatory, rendered in silver, are being built. The River Restaurant will be reopened and a new champagne bar added. External works include a new courtyard to the entrance and external façade refurbishment incorporating new windows, cathodic protection and stonework.

The project team includes Reardon Smith Architects, Buro Happold structural engineers, Gardiner & Theobald quantity surveyors and Hurley Palmer Flatt M&E consultants.

Challenges

The Savoy refurbishment project is large, complex and being undertaken to a tight schedule, meaning efficient sharing of information is essential.

Rob Anderson, Document Control Manager at Chorus, oversees a team of document controllers across the project. His remit is to manage document control and related protocols across the Chorus Group, playing a leading role in set-up and delivery.

Anderson said, "Projects are growing in scale so we need to manage information much more efficiently. The Savoy is a £65 million (US\$117m) project, with a team that is dispersed across Britain and includes a consultant in the Middle East. There's a heck of a lot of information flying around – we're building at a rapid rate and require real-time sharing of information."

When looking to share documents and correspondence between team members, Chorus felt that there were limitations to using Windows-based products such as Microsoft Outlook.

"Managing information in-house has huge time and cost implications," said Anderson. "Previously, Outlook and Windows-based products were the most common ways of managing information and this meant that data was dispersed across PCs rather than being centralized.

"Relying on Outlook to transmit large files is a concern as larger file transmission can be a problem. Sometimes we'll want to send 150 drawings at once, or 600 in a single day. Can you imagine trying to send 600 1mb files across standard email?"



Having data held on PCs and contained within organizations would also make it harder for Chorus to ensure that correct document control protocols are being followed across the project team.

“Standardizing document control protocols can be difficult because different people have different standards,” said Anderson. “This increases the chance of errors. Particularly with the risk of litigation, you need an audit trail. If someone forgets to type “Revision B” into a spreadsheet because they got distracted, it can be costly and cause a dispute.”

Chorus also recognized that storing information in silos rather than in a shared environment would be expensive and inefficient.

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“Without a shared platform, there would be increased print and distribution costs and we’d struggle to share information in good time between parties. A major issue for us was, ‘How do we get information across our dispersed team of consultants and suppliers without spending big bucks on local and international couriers?’

“We needed a system that allowed efficient retrieval of our documents and correspondence, where there was proof of issue and receipt, and where all project information was in one platform so that it’s easy to track and easy to archive,” said Anderson.

Solution

Chorus selected to use the Aconex online information management solution to manage their documents and correspondence. Aconex is a web-based system, delivered as a service for the life of a project, that enables team members to manage their information using one central platform. The system allows internal and external participants to view, distribute and track their files electronically at any time and from any location. As with any new system or process, user adoption is the key to the success of Aconex.

“One reason Aconex was selected was because aesthetically it looks good and has a user-friendly interface. Because of this, it’s easier to get people to use it,” said Anderson. He added, “There’s a nice clear distinction between what constitutes a document and what constitutes a project mail, plus they provide good training and support.”

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Results

Since being implemented on the Savoy project in 2007, Aconex has been used by 270 team members from 40 organizations to manage up to 40,000 documents and project mails each month.

When documents are stored on Aconex, authorized team members, from any location, can quickly retrieve their files by searching on criteria such as keywords, document types, status, date ranges and sender and recipient details. Files can then be distributed electronically using the system.

Anderson said, “Aconex delivers an effective way of managing information – it’s efficient and saves time, cost and resources. By using the system we can share information instantaneously. People can tap into their files and mails remotely from wherever they are. They can access project information on the move, at home and receive updates on their Blackberries.

“Compared to Outlook or paper-based information management, there is faster distribution of files. It cuts down on handling, postage, shipping, and so on, the whole time-consuming process. With Aconex, you just tick a box next to files you want to distribute and click ‘Transmit’.

“There is certainly less money spent on couriers and postage. We estimated that we could save approximately £25,000 (US\$45,000) on printing and postage over the duration of the project.”

Aconex maintains a complete archive of documents and project mail, with an audit trail of every transaction detailing ‘who did what and when’. This reduces risks such as disputes, information loss and works being carried out using outdated documents.

“We like that when something is stored on Aconex it’s set in stone. You can’t tamper with it,” said Anderson. “We have a better audit trail and there is better accountability for all parties.”

When document control protocols have been agreed, the system standardizes procedures such as document numbering, submissions, approvals and formal correspondence, so that they are consistent across the project.

“Being able to track our transmittals over the system is a powerful QA feature. It ensures that documentation goes out on time and if we need to get back to design consultants to reject a drawing, we have an audit trail of the exchange. It speeds up doc controllers’ tasks and definitely speeds up the management of documentation compared to using paper or email.”

Aconex features the ability to generate reports, giving Chorus and other project participants a bird’s eye view of the flow of information and the status of key tasks.

Anderson said, “Reports can be generated for Management to identify outstanding items and track the status of RFIs, site instructions and replies. This makes life easier for them as they can gain an overview of documentation or view a revision history when required.”

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Summarizing the use of Aconex on the Savoy project, Anderson said, “There is better information management across the project, so all parties benefit. It allows us to liaise efficiently between the design team and subcontractors. Information is more transparent across the team and the audit trail helps ensure that people are doing what they should be.”

Aconex, www.aconex.com, is the world’s largest provider of online collaboration to the construction and engineering industries. Aconex is one the UK’s leading vendors and its clients include Morgan Ashurst, Brookfield, Farrans, Multi Development and McDonald’s Restaurants.