Case Study on First Rate and HR.net

Introduction

First Rate Travel Services is a joint venture between the Bank of Ireland and Post Office™ Ltd to provide outsourced foreign exchange solutions.

Originally made up of 35 people, the firm now employs 240 staff in permanent roles, plus some 50 to 60 temporary staff. First Rate Travel Services' largest customer continues to be the Post Office, although the company has a growing number of other corporate clients.

First Rate Travel Services is currently the largest foreign exchange provider in the UK, handling an extensive range of currencies; and was the first company in the UK to provide foreign exchange with "0% commission".

First Rate Travel Services currently operates from a number of geographically dispersed sites, including three main offices, four smaller sites and approximately two dozen home-based workers. The company plans to develop additional sites as the business grows and develops.

Industry:	Money Exchange
Established:	1994
Number of Employees:	240
Headquarters:	Middlesex

Challenge

HR Director, Joe Healy, first joined First Rate Travel Services in 2004, with a remit to develop the company's HR function. One of the first areas he turned his attention to was the company's need for an electronic HR system. At the time, the HR function was using a combination of spreadsheets, paper files, soft files and databases: the solution was neither sustainable nor scalable. The firm urgently required a flexible system of workflow, which would enable automation and streamlining of manual processes to support the planned growth. Clearly a system was required that would allow all HR data to be consolidated reducing the amount of manual processes and labour involved.

Solution

To meet these challenges, First Rate Travel Services opted to implement HR.net, a powerful web enabled HR system. Using the latest .Net technology, HR.net allows any manual HR process to be replicated in electronic form, in real time.

As a web-based system, HR.net is accessible by any employee, regardless of location. The system surmounts geographical challenges and supports remote working.

Highly scalable, HR.net has the capability to meet an organisation's requirements as it expands and opens new sites. Additionally, HR.net enables a wide variety of tasks (e.g. requesting annual leave) to be carried out by employees on a 24/7, self-service basis.

Importantly, HR.net enables organisations to automate standard HR procedures.

The importance of HR.net primarily lies in creating capability for the HR function to support our business both now, and in the future.
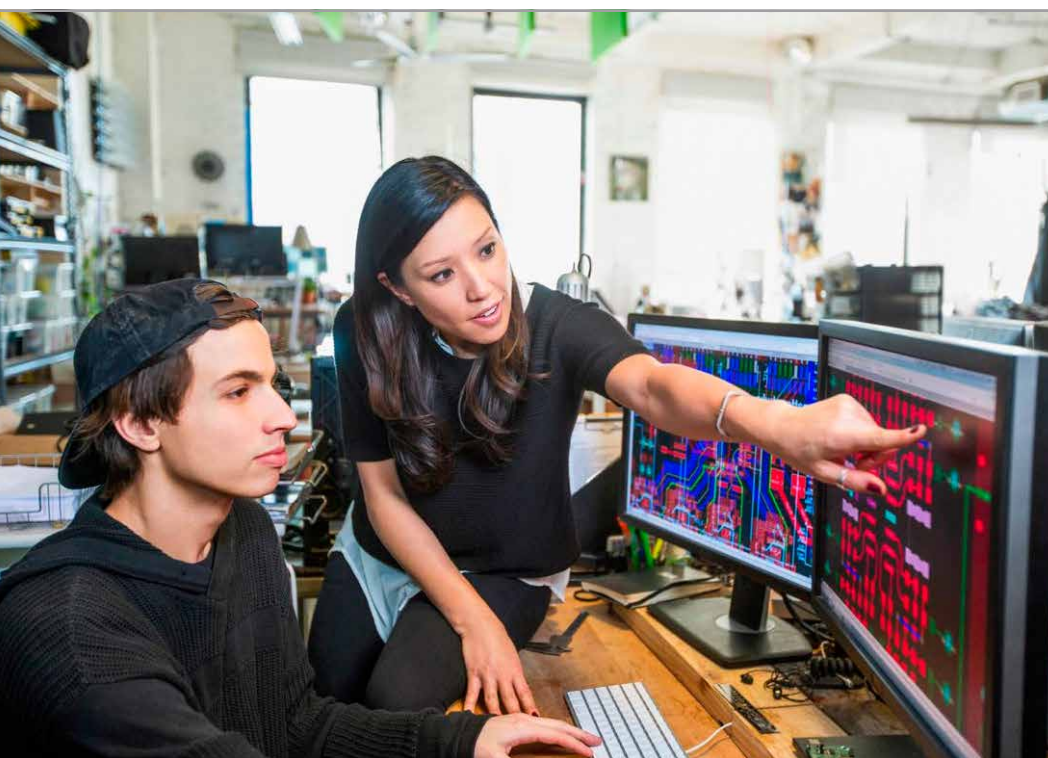
Key benefits

- Automation of previously manual, day-to-day tasks
- 24/7 access and employee communication across multiple sites
- Precise, company-wide reporting
- Better service levels and faster request turnaround

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As an HR function we just couldn't support the projected business growth in our previous setup. The manual systems; paper files, emails and spreadsheets were simply not sustainable

Joe Healy
HR Director at First Rate travel

Additional benefits

First Rate Travel Services had HR.net configured to automate time sheets, which now feed directly into payroll. This removes a major headache: beforehand, the process was spreadsheet-based and cumbersome. Holiday approval and tracking, sick leave and recruitment procedures have also been automated.

Importantly, all automated processes take place live and enter the HR.net database in real-time.

HR.net will also enable First Rate Travel
Services to achieve a number of cost savings, for example, by reducing the amount of administrative effort required to manage absence. The automation of processes is also bringing greater transparency to areas such as absence management, which should drive behavioural changes.

HR.net has also played a critical role in the redesign of First Rate's Intranet. Prior to the installation of HR.net, the Intranet (a custom-built system which had supported the company well during its initial phase of development) had only one point of posting, via the IT department.

HR.net has been used to improve access to the Intranet, enabling a number of "communities" to be created (i.e. for managers, employees), each with its own web page and access to the Intranet.

In effect, HR.net allows a series of "mini-portals" to be created, through which various employee groups gain entry to the company's Intranet. Joe Healy stated "Now, there are ten points of entry to create information on to our Intranet — in effect HR.net has widened the communication pipes so that more people can contribute and participate in the Intranet.

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The self-service aspect of HR.net allows each individual to take ownership of core administration processes and to get real time feedback on important processes. This has led to better engagement with these processes and a significant improvement in the quality of personnel data held.

Lesley Baird
HR Systems Manager at First Rate travel

Each community can directly manage information — either static data or dynamic workflows — that they wish to share with the company". Improvement to the company's Intranet has also allowed business managers better access to information about their team members. On entering the Intranet, managers can retrieve HR related information about their teams and people (e.g. how many days' holiday an employee has left), as well as update information about team members.

This change both improves the quality and speed of access to information, and reduces the amount of time managers spend requesting employee related data from the HR department. The intention is to promote a transfer of 'HR skills' and 'HR information' back to line managers

Future plans

First Rate Travel Services is looking to automate all remaining manual HR processes: in the immediate future, the company intends to implement further HR. net standard workflows, including the fleet management and expenses modules.