

Integration Supports Business Growth for SIAC

As a large multi-disciplined construction group, SIAC Construction Ltd faced a real business issue in 2001, one familiar to many expanding construction businesses. SIAC's organic growth and a number of business acquisitions had resulted in various disparate Information Technology systems being used across the group.

A combination of two industry systems covered the basic construction business requirements of financials, costing and subcontracting. The result – no consolidated business reporting without a great deal of reconciliation, validation, manual intervention and suffering from the limitations and costs associated with all of the above. In the accounts department alone, 6 days were being spent, every month, on reconciliation.

Eliminating more than 20 systems through a rigorous and scored Request for Proposal (RFP) selection process, SIAC's final unanimous choice in 2003 was COINS. 'COINS offered a fully integrated, multi-currency system which fulfilled all legislative requirements for the Irish and UK construction industry along with the additional modules which could be utilised by our divisions – for example EC Intrastats, accruals and expenses which were previously being carried out off-line' says Eamonn Buckley, Information Systems & Technology Manager, SIAC.

Core financials, procurement and payroll systems were implemented first in the head office, 10 divisions and in 4 key project sites – followed up by implementing the Fixed Assets module, Expenses and Intrastats, and Internal and External Plant. The COINS Intrastat functionality simplifies making returns to the government when SIAC finds itself buying in one jurisdiction and exporting to another. An example of such a contract is the 20 Km A1/N1 Newry to Dundalk Link Road – part of the Dublin to Belfast motorway route.

'Originally estimated to take three to four years, the rollout has taken place ahead of schedule with minimal disruption to day-to-day business,' says Eamonn Buckley. SIAC developed a standard implementation process which, used by the same internal Applications Team for each new COINS roll-out, has been key to their success. The team members are now highly experienced and can apply their knowledge with each deployment.

'SIAC has seen significant business growth and COINS has proved invaluable in supporting this, through its application in joint ventures and acquisitions,' says Eamonn Buckley. 'In the cases of joint ventures even when our partner is the dominant player, COINS is often the system of choice for the project. On the M50 upgrade project – a 50/50 joint venture with Ferrovial – SIAC rolled COINS out using a



▲ M50 upgrade project a 50/50 joint venture with Ferrovial – M50/N4 interchange

standard implementation process, in 3 months. In January we implemented COINS in SIAC Tetbury Steel, which we acquired in September 2006.'

'Users appreciate the advantages of an integrated system and the removal of numerous spreadsheets!' comments Eamonn. With 200 users regularly accessing COINS, the business now benefits from information being stored in one central system. Increased financial visibility across the business means management reporting and information analysis is significantly improved. The burden of supporting multiple IT systems finally removed, the SIAC application team now focus on supporting the users and driving forwards the effective application of COINS.

The SIAC IT Applications team continues to work very closely with the divisions and the COINS team where appropriate – a key objective being to achieve continual process improvement. 'The close working relationship with COINS is as valuable today as it was in the early project phases,' concludes Eamonn Buckley.

SIAC Construction is a large multi-disciplined construction group with significant operations across Ireland and the United Kingdom. SIAC provides turnkey solutions to the Civil Engineering and Building industries and has extensive Commercial Development and other investment interests. www.siac.co.uk

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COINS opens Irish Office

Adding to four existing International locations, COINS have established an Irish base. In recognition of continued successful growth in Ireland and the desire to provide an unparalleled level of service to the existing 14 clients in the area, Barbara White has been appointed as COINS General Manager for Ireland, effective from the 2nd January 2007.

The new office will be based in Dublin and over the coming months Barbara will build a team to provide support services to the rapidly growing number of customers in Northern Ireland and Eire.

'Locating COINS staff locally will enable us to offer a better service to our Irish customers and will certainly assist us in working more closely with the authorities to better prepare for legislative changes (e.g. Tax and Subcontract), as we do in the UK,' comments Barbara. 'I hope and expect the Irish clients will quickly see the benefits of this positive move, and I am looking forward to the new challenge and the opportunity to build on our success,' adds Barbara.

Supporting Barbara's comments, Tom Bambrick, Group ICT Manager, Ascon Contractors said that, 'I am delighted and see this as a very encouraging move by COINS, one that I expect will be very beneficial to the Irish COINS Client base, particularly in relation to recognising local issues and legislation.'

Barbara joins COINS with over 23 years' experience in the IT industry, the last 6 of which were spent in the Construction industry in Ireland, working as Group IS&T Manager for a major contractor. Barbara has worked extensively in Ireland, UK and Europe and was last year voted ICT Professional of the year at the ICT Excellence awards. Her background includes business skills, extensive project management, IT and management skills and of course construction industry experience.



▲ Barbara White, COINS General Manager for Ireland

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India – Impact of funds raised by Construction Industry

A team of 13, who have made noteworthy contributions to the COINS 3 Peaks Challenge over the years, were privileged with a life-changing visit to see the final outcome of CARE's projects in Tamil Nadu, Southern India, an area devastated by the Tsunami. Bill Mellor from COINS reports:

Passing a number of temporary housing settlements that still remain two years on, we travelled south from Chennai (once Madras) to the Cuddalore District, the second most affected area in Tamil Nadu in terms of loss of lives and livelihoods. Here we witnessed our first three housing development projects. During construction of the new homes, the population had lived in temporary palm huts - the difference between accommodations was astounding. At one of the settlements an entire inhabited island had been lost, 39 people had died; we were told the numbers were, so low, as many were saved by the dense mango trees. Today, the old village is now nothing more than a desolate sandbar. The communities lost all their fishing boats, and with them their livelihoods. Here CARE micro-finance projects were helping to restore things and indeed improve them; for example through, the provision of capital funds for the community to manage and offer loans to families for the purchase of chickens and on a larger scale to buy a solar fish drying unit, multiplying incomes five fold and bringing sustainability.

A regular feature of life here is destructive cyclones sweeping across the area. The new houses, though simple and straightforward buildings, give for the first time completely weatherproof structures, as well as such basics as glazed windows and toilets - good sanitation previously being a very significant problem. Schools have been incorporated in the developments. Some 50% of India's population is still illiterate; education is a key aspect of the new developments. We were particularly heartened to hear the speech from one village chief: 'Last generation we were mere peasants. Now our children can start to read and write. Their own children one day will be able to study to become doctors and engineers. Just like you.'

From the Chennai area the team travelled to the very southern tip of India – the Kanyakumari District. At Keelamanakudi we paused at an estuary – the remains



▲ Top: Temporary and new housing. Middle: CARE replacement boats, villagers and Stella's flour mill. Bottom: Devastated village island post Tsunami.

of the bridge, a key link for the town, had been torn like paper. Here we heard a tragic account: more than 600 had died, mainly women and children. The women, trying to save the children and restricted by saris could not run well or climb the trees, caught up by the thorn bushes, most of them drowned. Somewhat disturbed by this, we moved on to visit the main CARE project in the area, a micro-finance project, Stella's flour mill and chilli powder unit, run by 10 local women, which was providing them with a sustainable income.

Putting things in perspective, we learned that each new house costs in the region of £1,500, so minimally for every team entered into the COINS 3 Peaks Challenge this year, CARE can build four. We were also made aware that in many project areas more can be achieved with our unrestricted funds, since CARE can leverage as much as four times the amount raised.

The trip was an immeasurable success, giving all an understanding of what CARE can achieve with funds raised through the COINS event.

Contractors Migration

COINS contracting clients are discovering how painless the move to OA is. Beard and Parkstone have already completed their move to a new server in readiness for COINS OA. Clive Basset's views on Beard's commitment to COINS and their switch over were quoted in our Summer 2006 Edition. On the migration, Richard Avery of Parkstone said: 'Staying at the forefront of technology is key to support our business growth. We migrated to OA in 3 weeks, across the entire business, with the exception of plant. Users benefit from the mobility through the application and particularly welcome the high availability of information on screen. Because OA is the same COINS application, only with an enhanced and more modern view, the transition for users has been seamless.'

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Following suit are George Leslie, W J Harte, Deejak, Bryen & Langley, Holloway White Allom and Lancsville.

Occasional users of COINS, typically surveyors, contract management staff and site clerks in particular are finding the familiarity of the browser interface beneficial. They can interrogate and review their costs for example without the need to become familiar with COINSplus or have any special software on their PC.

COINS recommend clients first review their infrastructure as the life of their current server comes to an end, replacing with either a new Linux-based server or, as is becoming increasingly popular, consider hosting. Optionally clients can then upgrade to make the latest OA features available. Rolling out OA can initially be to restricted selected users, for specific tasks if preferred.



▲ Richard Avery, IT Manager, Parkstone

New House Builder's Module

The first release of the eagerly-awaited COINS House Builders Bill of Quantities (HBBOQ) module has been delivered to Kier Residential. Kier, who were a key development partner, are assisting COINS with beta testing through February and March 2007 before the product becomes generally available in April.

HBBOQ can be viewed as the final, major development project in making COINS a truly comprehensive business solution for Specialist House Builders and developers. The module links with the COINS VAP, Procurement and Land Appraisal modules allowing users to maintain comprehensive House Type Bills of Quantities which can then be used to generate budgets, procurement packages, schedules and standard costs.

In the future technological innovations such as web services and the COINSetc trading hub will allow much of the maintenance of the BOQs to be automated by linking the COINS database directly to component and pricing information in material suppliers' systems.

Our thanks to all our development partners for their significant contributions: Kier Residential, Persimmon, Fairview and Octagon. We are delighted that Mactaggert & Mickel, Shepherd, Fairview and Dandara have also become early adopters of this new module.

Getting Ahead on CIS

The go-live date for the new CIS tax scheme on 6th April (Good Friday) is rapidly approaching. While some general industry concerns remain, almost 90% of COINS clients who pay UK subcontractors through COINS are already taking steps to cope with the changes and are ahead of many others in the industry, although there is no room for complacency.

'COINS clients have been quick on the uptake to ensure, as far as possible, that they are fully trained,' acknowledged Jim Etherton, COINS Senior Product Manager. Nearly 400 delegates from over 100 clients are so far attending the series of 18 client training seminars offered by COINS around the country from January through to March.

When asked about the value of the COINS CIS seminar John Grant, Martin Grant Homes stated, **'Combining presentations from HMRC and COINS ensured I was able to learn the requirements of the new scheme and how to operate it using COINS in a single day, which along with the documentation provided, has been of enormous value.'**

Other comments from delegates:

'Thanks for the CIS course on 23 January. It was very useful. I feel very confident that COINS will perform perfectly with the CIS scheme. Thanks for all your efforts and those of everybody else that has been involved in developing this part of COINS.'

Angela Root, Kier Group

'Very well organised and good to see COINS are very well placed for 6th April 2007.'

Nick Bean, May Gurney

With full support of clients where appropriate, COINS over the past two years has been making the necessary software amendments, as well as showing market leadership by being at the forefront of discussions with HMRC and with BASDA (the Business Application Software Developers Association). This has helped ensure that matters of wider concern within CIS are addressed and has included being instrumental in specifying the requirements for HMRC test data.

Jim Etherton assured that 'while the test facilities which HMRC delivered fell well short of the requested full end-to-end testing, it is clear that by working closely with BASDA and HMRC some significant problems with the new scheme have been prevented by identifying issues in the HMRC software in time for them to be fixed before go-live'.

During a two week joint testing period at the end of November last year, uniquely for the industry, 11 staff representing six major clients spent a day with COINS in Slough testing the software with the opportunity to send test verification and month-end submissions to HMRC. Our thanks to the following for their contribution: Robert Dickenson and Alistair Oxby, Persimmon; Anthony Balance and Angela Root, Kier Group; Carla Gamble, Morgan Est; Dave Brealey, Lovell; Mark Bennett and Sue Douglas, AMEC; Griffin Turton, Geoffrey Osborne; Tony Graham and Doug Graves, Barratt.

However, the real test of the new electronic monthly reporting for CIS will come in the period from 6th April to 19th May, when the first returns are due. To help make certain, Kier Group and Morgan Est, will receive fast-track registration for electronic CIS services to prove live connectivity within the first few days of the new scheme and COINS are gearing up to ensure that they will be able to support all UK clients, with extra staff allocated to support.

Industry concerns remain surrounding the readiness of the Government Gateway and HMRC systems to cope with demand for on-line CIS services and also the risk of errors causing rejected submissions. In discussions with HMRC and the Cabinet Office, COINS have been given assurances that usage forecasts have been appropriately considered and provided for. Insofar as possible, COINS have also ensured that the software has been designed to minimise errors by automating tax calculations and validating input rigorously. This should mean that most errors that could result in rejected submissions can be detected within COINS and corrected before ever being submitted to HMRC.

COINS will continue to work with HMRC and clients as closely as possible on testing right up to and through the initial go-live period. Recognising that software is only part of that solution, first class training, consultancy, documentation and support, all of which are of vital importance to the provision of a complete CIS solution, will continue to be offered.



▲ CIS delegate reviewing seminar agenda.

For those contractors who do not already have suitable software solutions in place, please refer to the white paper "HMRC's reform of the Construction Industry Scheme (CIS) – the implications on IT Systems", sponsored and co-authored by COINS, together with other members of BASDA.

New CIS Tax: Check List

Infrastructure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hardware Communications IR-Mark 	Software <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Upgrades Fixes Configuration
Data <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subcontractors CIS Records Last Paid Dates 	Users <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Training Security Procedures

The IR Mark

Like the payroll year-end submissions (which all COINS payroll clients have been using for the last one or two years), new CIS relies on electronic communication via the Government Gateway. However, new CIS introduces a new requirement known as the "IR-Mark" to prove that the files have not been tampered with en-route. This means that there are new technical installation and testing requirements to ensure that this communication will operate effectively. COINS clients must request an updated "Daltrey" test to prove that their system will be ready.

Russia Visit

Tim Armitage and Derek Leaver visited the COINS development centre in St. Petersburg during early January in time for the Russian Orthodox Christmas celebrations. The operation was established 5 years ago to augment the UK and Australian development teams and during that period has grown in numbers and experience. The team of 17, now involved in the development and support of most of the COINS modules and also customer PDRs, boasts a number of PhD's and one real rocket scientist! Each of the COINS application development teams e.g. Procurement, House Builders, Finance, Plant is made of UK and Russian based developers and so there is a constant interaction between them and close collaboration, via e-mail/voice/web-meeting and also through visits to each others locations.

Technical Director, Tim Armitage, comments 'we began slowly by 'out sourcing' small discrete pieces of work in order to establish how well we could work with a remote development team, and to judge capabilities. The ability and enthusiasm of the team is excellent and they are now very much just an extension of the 20+ developers we have located in the UK.'



COINS Development Team, St Petersburg, Russia. ►



Directors Challenge Sunday 13th May 2007

This year's COINS 3 Peaks Challenge has been oversubscribed, with more than 40 teams signed up and now focused on training hard and fundraising. We have a unique opportunity for Directors to support their team's efforts to complete the challenge and at the same time network with their industry peers.

The Directors Challenge involves a moderate hike up Snowdon timed in such a way to meet up with teams upon reaching the summit. The team of Directors will be accompanied by COINS directors, senior staff, an experienced local mountain guide and a Director from CARE.

In the evening, Directors are welcome to attend the event reception and join in their team's celebration of their achievements.

To Register: Please contact Claire Greenwood: claire.greenwood@coins-global.com or by phone 01753 501000.



▲ Directors Challenge, Snowdon, May 2006.

Welcome New Customers



Oakmont Construction, based in Harlow, Essex have signed an agreement for a COINS

system to be implemented over the next three months in time for the introduction of the new CIS scheme. The system will be hosted by COINS and includes Financials, Procurement and Plant. Oakmont has an established track record for delivering high quality office buildings alterations and refurbishments for commercial organisations. www.oakmontconstruction.co.uk

Glenbeigh Construction has joined the growing number of Irish construction companies to select COINS. The company was established in 1985 and today is one of the most successful construction companies in Ireland, specialising in commercial, refurbishment, fit-out, new build and pre-engineered modular buildings. Glenbeigh will implement a Financial, Procurement and Commercial system covering both head office and site functions. COINS came highly recommended to Glenbeigh which was a major factor in the decision-making process. www.gcon.ie



Lovell and Bluestone triumph with CIM

Lovell had identified a familiar problem: when purchase invoices do not match with delivery tickets, the query process takes several days to resolve and with a lengthy process of photocopying, retrieving and posting out invoices to regional offices and back again once resolved. Involving a similar process for the surveyors was the management of some 'open book' schemes where back-up invoices were required to support applications against costs incurred.

Aiming to put end-users in control of the data, remove reams of photocopying and speed up the flow of invoice queries, Lovell held a kick off meeting with COINS in July last year to discuss COINS Information Manager (CIM), an electronic document management system that is integrated into the COINS suite of solutions. CIM enables users to easily – and in some cases automatically – access scanned documents related to data they are currently viewing in a COINS module session.

By October Lovell had procured hardware, installed and tested CIM and were live on scanning purchase invoices linked to COINS. Harry Toor, System Accountant observed, 'The first phase of our CIM implementation went well, we now have a much faster internal response to query resolution, minutes rather than days and we have directly reduced our photocopying and postage costs.'

Phase 2 CIM Workflow is being tested – this has the ability to automatically route query invoices through Head Office account supervisors and out to the regional offices concerned. Workflow is triggered either by a commercial hold code against the invoice or an invoice being registered in COINS. The final approval in the Workflow removes the hold code in COINS allowing the invoice to be paid in the normal way. Phase 3 will be Optical Character Recognition (OCR) of the scanned images which create a transaction in COINS automatically.

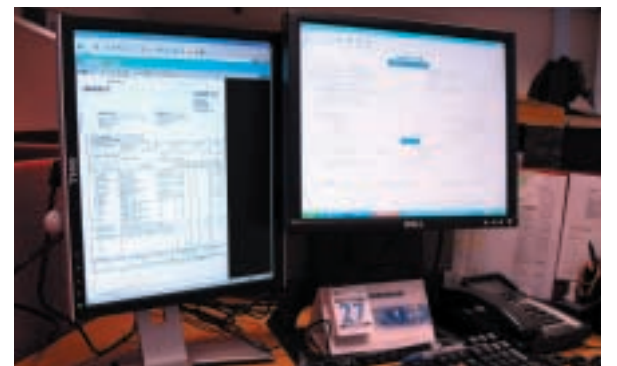
'Savings in retrieval time and costs of external scanning alone made CIM a winner all round.'

Harry concluded, 'All users who have access to COINS can now retrieve documents directly from COINS ledgers on demand and this linkage is really the key differentiator from other systems.' He continued, 'We have seen immediate rewards both tangible and non-tangible and anticipate greater benefits when the workflow is implemented. We expect to achieve a direct return on our investment within 12 to 18 months.'

Bluestone in contrast to Lovell were outsourcing document management to deal with approximately 140,000 purchase invoices per annum, but there was no indexing of documents or integration to transactions in COINS so retrieval was desperately slow.

Recalling the recent implementation Andy Martin, Financial Systems Manager commented, 'Phase 1 has gone very well. After procuring the required hardware, we went straight into setup and configuration of the test and live system. The testing and training of our staff was achieved in two weeks and we went live on 30th October. We were delighted that input was only slower for the first month, while staff found their way.'

Andy is aware that further benefits can be accrued with the implementation of Workflow, OCR and the full rollout of the CIM Browser and Image viewer throughout the business. However Andy says, 'The savings in retrieval time and costs of external scanning alone made CIM a winner all round, we expect to recoup our investment within a 3 year time frame.' He continued, 'It made perfect sense to use CIM as the real added value is the integration to COINS and we have the added bonus of a one-stop-shop service.'



▲ CIM in use at Lovell.

OpenEdge Management

COINS customers can now eliminate business downtime and reduce system management time with the use of OpenEdge® Management (formerly Fathom®).

Progress OpenEdge® Management makes the tasks of configuring, diagnosing, monitoring and managing applications such as COINS far easier, and will allow you to optimise your system resources and Progress database. It offers customers rich management functionality, through a browser-based console. Alert technologies enable proactive corrections to be made before

issues such as lack of system resources, become serious and trend analysis also allows for capacity planning.

We understand the challenges faced by the COINS customer base in day-to-day operations and can use Progress OpenEdge® management to help address these.



Tulloch select Hosting

Tulloch Limited has opted to out-source its COINS application, signing a three year agreement for COINS hosting and RSM (Remote System Management). Following Tulloch Limited's sale of its construction business to ROK last year, it is now concentrating its efforts and resources on house building with well-regarded and highly successful Tulloch Homes.

Alasdair McDougall, Finance Director, Tulloch Homes comments, 'hosting was a natural choice for us; the IT expertise was included in the sale so we had no in-house IT or end-user support. The hosted route gives us delivery of the COINS application along with complete back-up, end user support and disaster recovery.'

