

Change has never been so easy - UNIT4 delivers a Dream solution to luxury travel company Bailey Robinson

“We are growing fast, have experienced significant change and needed a flexible finance system with information available on demand,” says Andrew Murray, Finance Director at Bailey Robinson. “With UNIT4’s Dream, we have that solution; the information is accessible and accurate and we can drill down into data confidently as and when we need to. It has impressive integration capabilities which enable the system to adapt as our business grows and changes, helped by the ongoing support offered by UNIT4.”

With a history spanning 30 years, Bailey Robinson, formerly Roxton Bailey Robinson, is a British-based luxury travel company. It is renowned for its tailor-made journeys around the world, African safaris and holidays to some of the finest hotels and luxury resorts in the Indian Ocean, Caribbean, Latin America, South East Asia, Europe and North Africa.

A changing landscape

When Andrew joined the business in January 2005 he inherited an accounting system that had been built up over five years without ever having been properly implemented. Just for a start, the chart of accounts ran to an impossible 74 pages.

“It was clear immediately that I wasn’t going to get any meaningful information out of the system,” he says. “I would have to spend a tremendous amount of time and money upgrading the software and restructuring it to get the information I needed, and this was time and money the business, and I, could not afford. Although what we offer is specialised, we need to act quickly if we are to stay ahead of the competition and not having the right data would prevent us growing our business effectively and losing market share, which was a risk we could not take. Having implemented UNIT4 Dream at a previous company I knew its capabilities and was confident that it was the right product for us. I didn’t need to look any further.”

Therein started the relationship with UNIT4 - one that has gone from strength to strength over the years and UNIT4 Dream is still delivering. Indeed most recently, Bailey Robinson, which was formerly part of Roxton Bailey Robinson, has undergone a period of significant business change. In 2011, it demerged from Roxton leaving it as an entirely separate entity and Andrew with the need to further separate out core business and financial processes.

The situation was further complicated with the purchase of London-based Real Holidays in late 2011. Andrew commented: “We really have gone through the full gamut of business change - rapid growth, restructuring, demerger and an acquisition. Any change is unsettling and of course I was conscious of the potential issues that could arise when trying to import and export data between systems and set up the new Bailey Robinson business from a technological perspective. That said, the capabilities of UNIT4 Dream combined with our experience of it have ensured that our financial and business processes were in safe hands and that the data could be reconciled between systems quickly and accurately and with minimal disruption to our day to day activities. In fact, the adjustment to all of our business changes has been relatively painless. Looking back over the course of our relationship with UNIT4, we have really had no issues. We benefit from access to a first class finance system that evolves to meet our changing needs and the trusted partner relationship we enjoy with UNIT4.”



A Dream journey with UNIT4

The first implementation within Bailey Robinson started back in July 2005 and, according to Andrew, the journey has been smooth and without issue ever since. Right from the start UNIT4 Dream has proven itself as a flexible, highly adaptable and change friendly solution. It has delivered ease of administration and use combined with comprehensive and reliable finance data without the price tag or on-going costs associated with other solutions. Andrew has taken full responsibility for the implementation of UNIT4 Dream, including the design and build of the first database. "We always have an eye on costs and because of the functionality of the Dream ledger system it is fairly simple to distil the chart of accounts into a meaningful structure. So this was something I knew I could deal with myself," says Andrew. "This has not only saved me money when it comes to consultancy hours but also Dream allows me to add significant amounts of analysis information to a transaction, replacing separate accounts for each department and cost centre, which has improved the quality and depth of data I can access at any given time."

He was also able to write routines to extract data from the booking and customer relationship management systems. This allows customer and supplier master information, invoices and credit notes to be imported directly into Dream giving a single view of crucial business and finance information and enabling quick and easy analysis and reporting.

UNIT4 solutions offer that all important self-service element which empowers users to make changes as and when

changes occur. When it comes to finding answers as well as the help files, Andrew has access to the help desk and a UNIT4 consultant, which have all proved invaluable to him during the change processes he has needed to oversee. Initially the UNIT4 consultant would visit twice a month to check all was on target and that the design and build were progressing in line with expectation, but as time has gone on the self-service strengths of Dream have come to the fore and the Bailey Robinson team oversee updates itself with little input required from UNIT4, although Andrew knows the team is on the end of the phone should he need them, "There have been few problems that I couldn't deal with. But if the help file couldn't solve it, the support desk or the consultant did."

Automated finance and user-definable forms

With the first month closing early and the whole system going live in just a few days, immediate benefits were realised. Eighty per cent of the data that used to be re-keyed was now automatically imported, as were bank statement details.

"The form design functionality is absolutely marvellous," says Andrew. "I had no experience of it until I started this project, but it is fairly straightforward for somebody without IT training. It allows for really well structured input of transactions. When we receive invoices from overseas suppliers, we are able to import the booking code and departure date, which are crucial for further analysis."

DreamView, the Microsoft Excel® add-in, is used to build reports and management accounts. The spreadsheet file is refreshed directly from the Dream database and is

automatically sent to users by email for immediate review and analysis. The automation of this process saves Andrew a great deal of time and means he can focus on the more strategic elements of his role in the business.

"The Dream reports allow us to drill back into details of performance," says Murray. "We can even get revenue from each brochure at the press of a button; an essential but a painstaking and time consuming process with the system we used previously."

The monthly close reduced from 15 working days to fewer than five. This is mainly because the open ledger system allows detailed margin analysis by individual holiday booking. This cuts down the previously laborious review process to ensure that everything is paid up, so that revenue and cost of sales are accurate for the management accounts. Also, calculating depreciation was a very painful task taking hours but with Dream it takes a matter of seconds. In addition, Dream allows Andrew's team to run depreciation for the current reporting month and automatically generate budgeted and forecast balances for future periods.

Provision of different transaction types

In addition, Bailey Robinson has benefitted from Dream's ability to allow for different transaction types within the system. The company uses budget and forecast transactions types as well as actual transaction type to give a clear view of what is known and expected.

This means that Andrew can produce his budget for the coming year and then run two in-year forecasts comprising the actual achieved out turn combined with forecast out turn. This is a powerful addition to the solution's capabilities as Andrew can, at the click of a mouse, perform on-going forecasting and reforecasting as required to determine final turn out. This enterprise wide knowledge and insight is used by Bailey Robinson to make decisions about its current and future direction and focus based on both accurate projections and the business's current performance. And all from data held within the same system.

Reports at a button click

The ability to import data and report on that data at the click of a mouse has saved Bailey Robinson a tremendous amount of time. Previously the business generated gross revenue of over £2m and employed a finance team of six people who covered two trading companies. They spent much of their day re-keying information between systems which was time consuming, costly and error prone. Today, three trading companies generate gross revenue of around £3m and the

team of five finance professionals are able to spend most of their day doing accounting and analysis work because Dream has automated many of the previously manual processes.

"At the start of the project, we intended that our teams would get their accounting work done quickly and spend more time focussing on some of the problems inherent in our booking system," says Murray. "Initially there were some reports that didn't work because we hadn't devoted the time and attention required to clear down accruals and so on. But I am pleased to report that we ironed out those issues quickly and continue to achieve our goal to spend less time crunching the numbers and more time looking at what the data tells us about our performance and where we can improve, save more money and build our profitability. And that improvement in performance can be attributed to our use of UNIT4 Dream."

The business as a whole now enjoys better reports and management information, as a result of better quality data and improved reporting functionality. Reports that previously took weeks to prepare by going through the nominal ledgers and producing complicated spreadsheets have now been replaced by a few button clicks.

"The quality of the reports is phenomenal," says Andrew. "I can report by groups of departments or analyse the performance of specific brands just by clicking a refresh button. If more explanation is required, I can view the attachment to a transaction, which is a revelation."

Embracing change the Dream way

"UNIT4 Dream has significantly improved the visibility of all our accounting transactions and given us greater control of the balance sheet. I think it's an ideal solution for growing businesses like ours that are subject to change," Andrew concludes. "I sit at my desk and can see at a glance what is going on and identify and act on any problem, which helps us to grow our business. My fellow directors remain amazed at how quickly we can access analysis of any part of the business and the quality of reporting and level of understanding of our performance are second to none. Dream gives us a real competitive advantage and is a solution that helps us embrace change without fear. It's a joy."


About UNIT4

UNIT4 is a global business software and services company that creates, provides and supports software for Businesses Living IN Change – delivered via the cloud or on-premise - to help these fast-changing organisations manage their business needs effectively. We strive to set the global standard for business solutions that help our customers to embrace change independently, in the most simple, quick and cost-effective way.

We have a broad portfolio of solutions that address different markets, requirements, technologies and types of organisation. The UNIT4 group incorporates a number of the world's leading change-embracing software brands, including: UNIT4 Agresso, our flagship ERP suite for mid-sized services-intensive organisations; UNIT4 Coda Financials, our best-of-class financial management software; and FinancialForce.com, the cloud applications company formed with investment from salesforce.com. UNIT4 has operations in 26 countries across Europe, North America, Asia Pacific and Africa (as well as sales activities in several other countries) for easy, local access to service and support.

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