

# Bringing IT into Focus

Charity for the homeless *Focus Ireland* has tripled in size without increasing its finance department thanks to accounting software from Exchequer.

Focus Ireland has been using the Exchequer Enterprise accounts package for the past six years. In that time the headcount of the homeless charity increased to 300. The finance department has not grown its personnel accordingly.

Finance director Louise Callaghan puts the success with which the finance department has absorbed the growth in the company down to its use of Exchequer software.

The charity's former accounting system would not have been able to operate on the scale the growing organisation was going to need. A search for a replacement system brought Exchequer to the attention of Focus Ireland.

The appeal of the Exchequer product was chiefly the flexibility of reporting it allowed. The ability to upload information directly from Excel and Info-Journals onto the Exchequer system was of great value.

"For our payroll needs alone that saves about one week in working time per month," says Callaghan.

The Exchequer system also worked out a bit cheaper than the competition, although this wasn't a major consideration in the purchase. The fact was that some of the larger vendors of accountancy software couldn't accommodate everything Focus Ireland wanted to do.

The price saving was the sugar on top of an already sweet deal. With the ease of integration and reporting functionality made possible, Exchequer significantly transformed how work was done in the Focus Ireland finance department.

"Using OLE links we have cut our inputting time at month end by up to 60%," says Callaghan. "The cost centre/department coding in conjunction with the report writer and OLE links has enabled accurate and timely end-user reports at complex project/donor levels for our management team and donors.

"This has led to efficiencies in our finance department enabling us to facilitate the steady growth of Focus Ireland in response to the growing needs of people who are homeless."

Focus Ireland financial reporting needs are complex, having to report at a department and donor level. The reporting code of Exchequer Enterprise allowed the finance staff to do that.

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Louise Callaghan, Finance Director, Focus Ireland

**"Being a charity we have to be very careful how we use our money. This system helped us because it minimises our administration costs, which are now less than 5pc of our total costs."**

"As a result we could take reports from Exchequer that were specifically targeted to each of our donors. Each of our statutory donors had different flexibility requirements."

Callaghan puts the success focus Ireland has achieved in the Leinster Society of Chartered Accountants Yearly Published Accounts Awards – three wins in the past four years – partly down to the software system they use.

The awards acknowledge clarity and compliance in an organisation and Exchequer has been instrumental in optimising these for Focus Ireland. "The reporting has helped us manipulate our information. We can go from management accounts to finance accountants very easily.

"Our challenge this year was that the standard changed because of the Statement of Recommended Practice for Charities. We have to show every item of expenditure by project. There's no way we'd have been able to do something like that on our previous system. It was really through the Exchequer coding we could only do that."

Focus Ireland has been using the system since 2001 and recently bought an add-on to the system, an online purchase approval package. "We can just do the purchase orders online and approve them. It minimises the paper flow around the organisation."

Eventually use of this add-on will be enabled for staff throughout the organisation. Currently just the five staff in the finance department use Exchequer. "We're going to be rolling it out to service managers and administrators to set up and approve invoices and orders. Eventually 100 people will have access, but to just the purchase order function."

This is another advantage of the system: it can be set up for different levels of access. Auditors, for example, can access it and view the information but can't change any of it.

Exchequer resellers Keysolve partnered with Focus Ireland for the implementation of the system and have provided excellent backup ever since, says Callaghan. "Being a charity we have to be very careful how we use our money. This system helped us because it minimises our administration costs, which are now less than 5pc of our total costs."



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