COMPANY PROFILE

EasyBuild says its enterprise resource planning system gives construction firms easier access to their data, enabling them to improve analysis, boost project management and win more work

A transformational data plan

KATIE BARKER

Data has the power to transform your business, but it can only have this effect when used sensibly and analysed correctly.

This is not as easy as it sounds, particularly on large construction projects that include multiple stages and a variety of subcontractors; in this environment keeping track of all your data, let alone analysing it, can be extremely challenging.

Construction software provider EasyBuild's enterprise resource planning system has been designed to not only give construction companies easy access to their data, but the ability to manage and analyse it too.

"What's more important for any construction company than big data?" asks EasyBuild CEO Carol Massay. As someone with over 30 years experience in the industry, she should know.

Making sense of data

"Understanding data allows you to make key decisions such as how to bid for that next project; is it similar to a previously undertaken project; what lessons were learnt regarding challenges and risks?" she says.

"Knowing which subcontractors performed to a high standard and what key suppliers delivered on time

EasyBuild CEO Carol Massay

is powerful information."

Residential housing firm Abbey Developments is a business that has been able to draw on the industry experience behind the system.

"EasyBuild was able to collect and transfer all our current data from different databases into the new EasyBuild system. They also provided significant training and back office support, always dealing quickly via

email or phone to our enquiries" says its financial director David Dawson.

The EasyBuild system is designed to bring all the information on a project together in one place, so the management team have access to all the relevant data, from costs to completion dates, and can analyse it accordingly.

"It's an end-to-end solution for a construction business. From bringing in the budget from an external system and forecasting to managing your costs for labour, plant, materials and subcontractors, it offers visibility for the whole cycle," Ms Massay says.

This is one of the aspects that prompted Gee Construction, part of the Headcrown Group, to switch to EasyBuild in 2016, (see box, left).

"EasyBuild carries a job through the entire life cycle of a project from marketing through inputting the budget to quantity surveying and cost management," says Gee Construction finance director Nigel Rickman.

"This is ideal as it will be used by a wide variety of our business and

"This is ideal as it will be used by our business and saves us money in licence fees"

NIGEL RICKMAN, GEE CONSTRUCTION

reduces the amount of systems we have to use and thus saves us money in licence fees."

Cost control

And while bidding for new work is one important aspect, managing the costs of current projects is perhaps a bigger challenge for many contractors and subcontractors.

"The key point for us is around cost value reconciliation; making sure that what you've told the client the project is going to cost is what it is actually going to cost. You're managing the cost and value of the project each month," Ms Massay says.

"Subcontractors are the biggest cost on a project. EasyBuild tells you in real-time what your subcontractor costs and liabilities have been during each monthly reporting period."

Undoubtedly costs on projects change, and this will be something most companies account for. But the earlier this is picked up, the swifter the action can be to absorb them and adjust forecasts, or rectify the situation through other means.

"You're able to forecast based on information that is derived from the procurement cycle," Ms Massay says.

"It also means any potential issues are flagged much earlier. It allows you to pick up issues in the month that it happens rather than retrospectively and decisions can be made before it's too late."

Inside job

The fact that the software was developed for the industry from within is one aspect that the company

believes sets it aside from other construction software solutions.

EasyBuild was developed in-house at London-based contractor and housebuilder Durkan Group, and the company has used it ever since. "It was built by construction for construction, within a top 100 contractor that couldn't get all the information it needed from its incumbent system," Ms Massay says.

Despite the political uncertainty that has been evident in recent months, EasyBuild has identified several growth areas in the past year.

"Brexit doesn't mean everyone is going to batten down the hatches; in actual fact we've seen there is a need for housing. The government is looking at investing to provide affordable housing for the rising population," Ms Massay says.

"Over the next 12 to 18 months we are targeting the housebuilding sector with our solution. It gives a housebuilder an end-to-end solution from managing the project to managing the sales process and then the aftercare process including the service and maintenance. We have a module for all aspects of the cycle," she says.

This integration of systems was one of the reasons luxury housebuilder Antler Homes is implementing the

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CAROL MASSAY, EASYBUILD
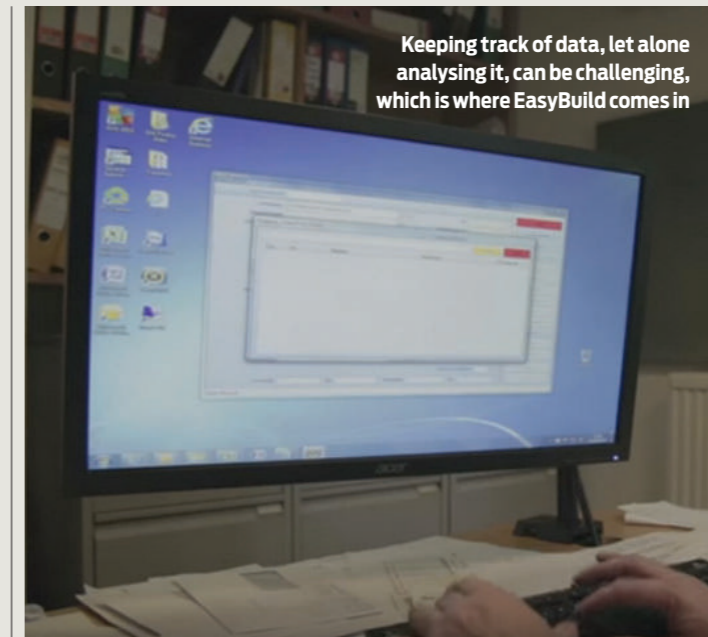
EasyBuild system for project accounting and the management of house sales.

"We were happy to see that EasyBuild completely integrates across the different ledgers, meaning many departments can use the system and they are linked with the accounts function," says Antler Homes financial director Peter Golding.

"We feel EasyBuild is flexible enough to meet the needs of a business our size."

Alongside housebuilding, the company is also seeing growth in other specialist industries. "Main contractors and housebuilders is where our strength is, but we are also looking to target demolition companies and concrete framework contractors," Ms Massay says.

"These sectors are growing and we feel we are the right fit for them as an out-of-the-box solution that can get a contractor up and running and give them the visibility to manage a project."

Win repeat business

But not everyone within the industry is open to new ways of working, and this is a challenge for a business like

Keeping track of data, let alone analysing it, can be challenging, which is where EasyBuild comes in

"We work with our customers to be a strategic partner, not just a software supplier"

CAROL MASSAY, EASYBUILD

EasyBuild. "The industry can still be hesitant to change," Ms Massay says.

"There is always an element of caution. Our answer to that caution is that now is the time to get the right systems in place to make sure you're being efficient.

"If you want repeat business from framework agreements, or extensions to projects, then your clients are going to expect you to show year-on-year improvement," she says. "They don't expect you to be buying the same tonnage of cement or bricks at the same price; they're going to be looking at you working better with your supply chain."

For Ms Massay and EasyBuild, the goal is better working relationships across the board.

"We work with our customers to be a strategic partner, not just a software supplier. We want to collaborate with them going forward; we want to better understand their pains and to help them achieve their goals," Ms Massay adds.

Produced in collaboration with EasyBuild

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