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Steve Winter General Manager, Nind Electrical Services (left),
with Dean Kelsall, Online Computers

Accredo powers growth of electrical contracting business

Growing Southland-based electrical contractors, Nind Electrical Services, easily manage a number of branches and stand alone companies using Accredo’s business management software. A recent project to plug online time and job sheet information directly into Accredo is helping the company streamline its administrative processes.

With 15 user licences and both front and back office staff working on the system, Accredo provides the firepower behind the firm’s accounting, job costing, and financial reporting processes. Nind General Manager, Steve Winter, says Accredo acts as the company’s core management tool. It is not only used at the accounting and reporting level, but by people on the shop floor and out on the road.

“We have a number of administrative staff using it, but we also have job estimators on the electrical and dairy side of the business using it to prepare quotes. Our foremen use it for printing out job sheets and, of course, our managers use it for pricing and financial reporting needs.”

With its head office in Invercargill and satellite branches in Queenstown, Cromwell and Winton, Nind is Southland’s largest electrical contractor. Operating for over 30 years, Nind undertakes residential and commercial electrical fit-outs and contract service work. Nind Dairy Services is a standalone company that operates out of its Invercargill office and focuses on providing dairy farms with electrical and engineering services.

Driving all this activity is the Accredo software system, an off-the-shelf system that Steve Winter says punches above its weight.

“There is a seamlessness from start to finish that makes Accredo very attractive and its front end functionality is very savvy.”

Since installing the system in 2007, Winter has worked with his Accredo support person, Dean Kelsall of Online Computers, to customise Accredo’s functionality to fit the way the business operates. Online Computers has designed a custom form which provides Nind with an interface to a rich layer of job costing functionality. Thanks to this, Nind can

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manage the production of quotations and track work in progress all from the one module.

"From one screen they can produce job estimates, monitor work in progress and put their purchase orders against each job so they can track costs very accurately," says Kelsall.

Says Winter: "It makes life a lot simpler for us. From each work in progress report we produce a claims sheet that is sent to the developer or builder

we are contracting to. It is an essential tool. Without Accredo providing this type of smart automation, we would be faced with quite a laborious task tracking down all the labour and material data pertaining to each job."

"Accredo provides smart automation. Without it we would be faced with a more laborious workload."

Steve Winter, General Manager,
Nind Electrical Services

Using data stored in Accredo, Winter says his estimators can open historic jobs to get an idea of what to quote on a similar current job.

"We also have a series of templates which the guys use to price work. We have around 30 templates for different types of housing and commercial work which we can pull up and modify accordingly."

As a result, Winter says his estimators can price work quicker and produce more accurate quotes. "The guys can price a housing job very comfortably in under an hour."

Accredo also makes short work of supplier pricelists. Winter says these can be uploaded to Accredo very easily and the system provides good functionality so users can access the relevant data on makes, models and prices.

Another customisation recently completed by Online Computers is helping Nind reduce time-consuming administrative overheads. Nind's electricians often perform maintenance work for industrial customers – one off repair jobs that are charged on a time and materials basis. Keeping track of the costs and utilisation of this work relied upon the electricians filling out paper-based time and job sheets, which were handed into the office at the end of each day. The data was then rekeyed into Accredo by administrative staff – a process that was both error-prone and time consuming for office staff to perform.

"Now we have short circuited that process," says Winter. "We have created a website that our guys can log into and record their time and job sheets online. This saves a lot of administration time as the information is piped directly into Accredo. There is no middleware involved – just a web interface that places the data straight into the Accredo Job Costing module."

As a result, there is now no information bottleneck at the office. Each electrician can log in and see all of the time completed against each job and they can enter the materials they have used.

Winter says the new process provides better visibility of the jobs they are working on. "The timesheet and job sheet are both present at the same time which means we can do a reconciliation much more easily."

"It also means we capture more information. In the past some materials weren't included on the final invoice because when things are noted down on pieces of paper they tend to get lost. Now everything is recorded directly into the system via a laptop and an online connection."

Winter says Accredo has accommodated the growth of the company without any problems. "When I started in 2002 we had 15 staff. Now, including the 50% share we have in another company called McNeill Pumping we have around 100 people. We operate Invercargill and Queenstown and the dairy business as three separate entities within the system and Accredo has easily scaled to meet our data and functionality needs."

One of the best things about the product, he says, is that it is not difficult to learn to use. "It is an intuitive system. We often have part-timers come in and do a variety of financial administrative tasks and they pick up using it very quickly."

The benefit Winter values above all else is the ability Accredo gives him to assess which jobs provide the best margin. "The work in progress reports we get from Accredo help me assess gross margin. I can look at the actual hours spent on a job and what was quoted by the estimators."

"That equation is now quite transparent and because I can extract that information in a timely way we can use it to fine-tune the way our electricians approach their work."