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Choosing the right hire software

By Matt Gordon, Centenary Hire

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FOR several years now our work volume has highlighted the need for hire software. In fact, the manually intense process of producing the EOM accounts satisfied the need alone.

We therefore had to make a decision about which hire software was best suited to the current operation of our business.

Knowing that whatever hire software we chose would bring inherent benefits was a positive feeling. Knowing that a purchase of the wrong Hire Software had the potential to cause serious dysfunction for our core operations was the reason we had put off our decision for some years.

I was charged with making this decision for our business. Right or wrong the impact of change will be significant so all the more reason to get the decision right, and to get it right the first time. To that end, I approached the decision making and research process in stages.

Matt Gordon and Michael Gordon of Centenary Hire in Brisbane, fully assessed the hire software options before making their decision.



1. Why do we want hire software? (or why do we want to change our existing hire software?)

While it may seem a question with a simple answer, knowing this and having it written down was a continual reminder of why I was dedicating so much time to this decision.

2. What features must our hire software have?

I wanted the hire software to mirror our current style of business operation. After listing the functions that I believed were core to our business I was left by default, with a list of what core features I needed to see already built into any hire software that I considered. In addition to the core features, I also compiled a "wish list" of features that could later help to separate any hire software products that met all of my core requirements.

3. I found out what hire software products were commercially available.

For all intents and purposes this was no different to sourcing any other product. I used all avenues of media open to me such as web searches, advertisements in the HRIA magazine, personal experience and opinions of colleagues from within the industry and even a handful of product information from various hire software reps who had dropped in over the years.

4. I made preliminary inquiries and compiled a list of hire software products worth looking at.

Having found numerous hire software products I selected as many of the products on face value alone, that I felt were worth following up. The follow up process was simple. I initially contacted the supplier and asked for additional info on their hire software. Secondly I spoke with them directly to see if I could put a tick in each box beside core features I had already established were required.

5. I was ready to see a full demonstration of the hire software products that looked good on paper and that had a tick beside all of our core features.

I found it useful to take notes as each hire software was demonstrated. There were a lot of features to consider and I could use my notes from one hire software product as a prompt when looking at another. I was interested to see how many of my "wish list" boxes could be checked off. Other considerations were the screen design, that is, whether a user moved across tabs on a single screen or whether a user opened and closed windows as a process progressed. How many steps did it take to complete a hire contract? Was it possible to customise the existing system controls to get a closer match to our style of operation? Is there provision to define user roles, to lock out of sensitive information areas or prevent information from being altered? Can I look up hire rates or cartage rates separate to any other function? And the questions just kept coming!

6. I short listed the remaining few hire software suppliers and contacted them again as I wanted them to prove their product on three levels.

- i) I requested working examples to be produced, with the examples being taken directly from our current operations. If the Hire Software really can meet my core requirements, now is the time for them to show me how it can do that. Also, by making this request of the Hire Software supplier I hoped to gain an insight into their level of commitment to both the product and to service based requests.
- ii) I requested details of installation methods, training upon installation as well as the amount and type of after sales service and support. Even the best hire software will be rendered unworkable if any one of these areas is not adequately covered. Hire software needed to be installed as it was intended to be used by the software developer. There needed to be an effective way of inputting our raw data into the hire software. Time needed to be assigned during set up to properly customise the system controls. Training for both me and our staff needed to be outlined in conjunction with the installation of the Hire Software.
- iii) I requested a list of references, including contact details for existing users. I firmly believe that a product or service should be able to sell itself based on customer satisfaction and subsequent recommendation. Speaking with existing users who have been supplied as references had to satisfy this belief. They were a source of information that would let me know the good, bad, ugly and annoying aspects that they have experienced with the hire software. A further advantage of speaking with a reference at their workplace was being able to see the hire software used in an operational setting. Once again following up on references would also give me another insight into how the hire software supplier would support us and their product after the sale.

7. I went back to the hire software suppliers and raised any new concerns I had following contact with their referees and asked any follow up questions.

I wasn't backwards in coming forwards at this point because it was nearly decision time. Now was the time to ask that lingering question or to go over once more that area of the hire software that I couldn't quite remember or wasn't sure of.

8. I took the cost of the final hire software products into consideration.

Cost was an important consideration but not as important as having hire software that works for our business and satisfies our answer to that initial question, "Why do we want Hire Software?" Cost needed to be considered on three levels.

- i) The cost of any software licence and/or user licences.
- ii) The cost of any software support and/or updates.
- lii) The cost of computer hardware to implement the hire software correctly.

9. I made a final decision and committed to it.

I knew that I had thoroughly investigated the available hire software products through a process of due diligence. I knew that I had considered them in conjunction with our business operation. I had seen tangible proof that the hire software did what the supplier said it could do by way of the working examples and from seeing it used live. I was satisfied with the feedback from existing users who were nominated as references. The cost was considerable but was within the budget. All that was left was to trust my research and commit to my final decision.

10. Plan Plan Plan!

After putting in the time and effort to find the right hire software product for our business, now I had to start a new process of planning the implementation. This was done by working with the supplier and using their experience having been down this road before as well as looking internally at what needed preparation for our "go live" date. Staff awareness, paperwork processes, printed stationary and who would ultimately be responsible for the implementation and ongoing management of the hire software were but a few further considerations.

Quite the process huh? But it gave a quality result and the benefits that we gain from having the right Hire Software will give us return on our time and dollar investment. Further to anything that is written above I can only advise on two further points.

First, the process of choosing a hire software product will not be completed in a matter of weeks. The second is that no computer software is completely intuitive. Learn how to use it and use it right.

Our "go live" date is 1st November 2008 (at time of going to print) with Syrinx Hire Software supplied by Software Link.

All going to plan I expect that in time our business will be on their reference list and I will be ready to give feedback.

I am confident we have covered all bases with the choice and implementation of our hire software. I am happy to share my experience further to anyone interested and can be contacted at matt@centenaryhire.com.au

About Centenary Hire

Centenary Hire, trading since 1981, is a family owned and operated single branch, general hire company in Brisbane. Michael Gordon is the owner and Matt recently returned to the business with the view of succeeding him.