

Document control for SMEs

Most businesses have a considerable volume of documents, which never change their format: standard letters and invoices would be an example. Then there are a smaller number of documents which need to be constantly reviewed and changed so that a business can improve: contracts, specification sheets and inspection instructions would fall into this category. "These are the small number of highly critical documents which often cannot be found in a hurry," said Bill Best, joint managing director of Proquis, which has 20 staff on Kent Science Park. "Filing them away does not do the job. They have to be stored and made continually available to the people who need them."

By ensuring these critical documents are always displayed in the correct version, companies can avoid making something too short or big by using the wrong specification, for example. If something goes wrong with a procedure, a company may have to show what inspection was used on a certain date. "You need a pretty cast iron guarantee you can find the relevant document quickly and be sure that what you are looking at was being followed on the relevant day," said Mr Best.

Large companies such as BAE Systems, Airbus and the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority have been using Proquis' web based document control system which has allowed them to manage documents for some time. "Very large companies have been using the technology for small volumes of very important documents. But we asked ourselves how we could make the quality of control the big companies are using available to SMEs at a cost they can afford."

The next step in Proquis' thinking was to realise that

some SMEs do not have an information technology department so document control is difficult for them. The answer was for Proquis to provide an application on the internet which SMEs can access through secure logins and use to store small volumes of invaluable documents which can then go through change management and be signed off. The process would ensure that all the right people can look at a document, wherever they are in the world.

“Everyone in a supply chain has improved access,”

"SMEs want to be able to change one of these documents and have their suppliers and customers all agree to that change. By putting the document in the (internet) cloud and making it available through a secure password system, suppliers and customers can all agree online that a change is acceptable." Mr Best said the system avoids the risks of sending documents as email attachments, because nothing is physically sent. "Everyone in a supply chain has improved access and the SME can ensure that everyone has signed for any change. If they don't, they are sent a reminder so that they can accept or reject the change." A concrete example might be someone working in a defence business who needs to know that a particular component on a new fighter aircraft at an RAF station is working correctly. "That person has to be sure that someone on the RAF station is looking at the right document," said Mr Best. "In turn that person in the RAF needs to access that document, knowing it is going to be right."

To buy the system would cost SMEs about £25,000. But

Proquis is making it available to rent for about £150 a month, depending on what SMEs want to do. In return, they have access to the service, some training and process mapping tool software. This is installed on a computer, and helps customers understand how documents and process mapping go together.

Proquis manages the documents, which are located on its server. "We do all the backup in case anything goes wrong," said Mr Best. "Some people are concerned about data being off site. It is a leap of faith, but people are getting over it. They should be, because we backup the system every day and it is probably more secure than SMEs would have otherwise." Customers log on to the server, use a template to create a Word document, for example, and indicate that the document is restricted and that those who are listed can see it. "The moment you tell the system who can see the document, it is released and the system deals with the emails."

Proquis' calculations suggest that once a document has been created and is released for approval, the time and effort involved is reduced by between 50% and 80%. "We think a lot of businesses stand to benefit from the savings the product makes possible," said Mr Best.

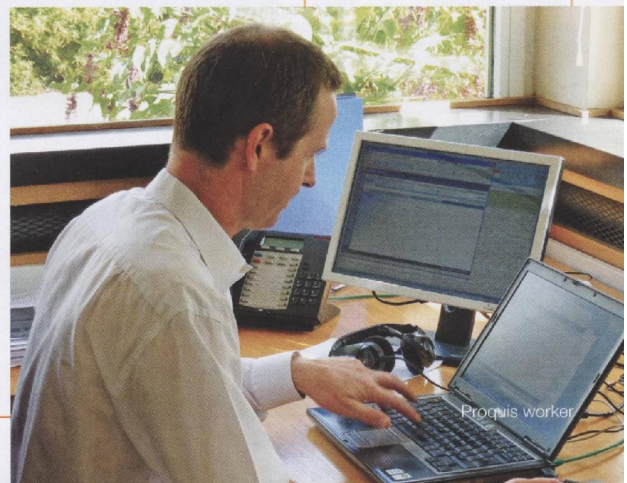
COMPANY:
Proquis

INNOVATION:
Document control system for SMEs

MARKET:
The potential is there for SMEs the world over to use the system. "The potential savings for companies using it is enormous, too"

INSPIRATION:
Twenty years ago, Proquis began with a quality management system for the BS5750 standard. The company grew through various iterations of this and ten years ago launched a web based system for large companies. Subsequently, SMEs said they wanted something similar, but could not afford the big company version

TURNOVER:
Over £1 million but under £5 million



PROQUIS

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