

eTimber – using modern Application Management to achieve ROI sooner



Legacy application transformations are now possible in a way that provides a return on investment earlier and no longer need to be a huge replacement project. Forestry England has recently achieved great results by transforming their older style application through selectively re-engineering individual modules.

Forestry England manages our woodlands in England and is responsible for the public forest estate. They care for more land and trees than any other organisation in England, shaping landscapes for people, wildlife and timber. Forestry England is the largest supplier of sustainably produced timber in England, selling around 1.4 million tonnes per year.

Forestry England's Sales Recording Package (SRP), used to manage timber stocks and sales, was a 20-year-old legacy application. It had been developed in-house in 2001 to provide an integrated solution for stock management, contract control, despatch recording and invoicing. The application was no longer fit for the purpose. The Oracle Forms screen design made it difficult to represent business processes accurately. Using the system was unintuitive and time-consuming. The system was complex, which led to handoffs between different teams to transfer the information into the SRP, which was inefficient, time-consuming and increased the risk of errors.

Forestry England was looking for the opportunity to re-develop and transform their SRP to meet their current needs and allow future requirements to be met. The new functionality Forestry England wanted to introduce was not possible with the technology they had at the time. They wanted to embrace new ways of working, including mobile working.

The Solution

The proposed transformation would take place by adopting an Agile development approach, running in parallel with support of the existing system, with functionality being replaced and newly introduced in a modular approach over the contract duration. This gradual transformation delivered improvements in stages over the duration mitigated risk, reduced cost and by focusing on the business priorities, delivered significant value earlier to the client.



As a result, the client:

- Saved time and money – through the ability to use a tablet to self-serve, which removed duplication of effort and handover, meaning more efficiency, accuracy and reduced number of handoffs.
- Experienced minimum disruption to the user base
- Had control over their budgets – as the new functionality was modular, enabling staged releases managed through a fixed budget. As a result, the client could control spend and prioritise what could be achieved in the time available. This approach helped to balance out new functionality with what could be achieved with the old legacy.
- Had enhanced reporting – which provided better business insight to management information due to the consistent and reliable way of forecasting sales, enabling them to plan more effectively.

CGI developed a new modern application platform called eTimber. We had a legacy app running on legacy app technology that we had previously migrated to the Cloud. The next phase of the approach was to replace the legacy app module-by-module using the same database at the backend. This meant that with old and new sharing the same database, each module could be replaced in priority order, achieving the biggest RoI straight away. The design made it as easy as possible for the users to switch between each application while both the old and new system were in use. This approach enabled the value of the existing historical SRP data to be maintained while delivering improved features and functionality at frequent intervals throughout the transformation.

The Agile team worked closely with the system owner from the client-side. We delivered the desired outcomes and ensured agility to re-prioritise as needed, adapting to feedback and new insights as the project progressed.

By developing a modern web application, there were no restrictions on how the UI could be designed. It provided an opportunity to migrate a like-for-like functionality while presenting a clean, simple interface that provided an intuitive, process-led experience.

Results

The iterative approach allowed requirements to be continually refined, updated and prioritised. Feedback was heard, lessons were learned, and the most valuable outcomes were delivered earlier with the maximum business benefit being realised.

The following outcomes were achieved:

- Improved staff productivity – due to the more intuitive user interface and it being easier and less time consuming to train new people - allowing them to focus on learning the business process, not how to use the application – staff productivity became slicker
- Improved knowledge and ownership – due to the system being easier to understand and use
- A future-proofed platform of continuous improvement – the modern technology platform made it easier to continuously enhance and improve eTimber as lessons were learned and new requirements emerged. Improvements could be implemented faster with the cost of introducing them reduced
- New opportunities delivered – through the new features and functionalities
- Significant return on investment

This case study demonstrates how flexibility in contracts and delivery methodologies can allow an early return in investment. By delivering the new features and functionality in parallel with the existing services, organisations can reap the benefits sooner.

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“The transformation project by CGI of our timber sales system has exceeded my expectations so far. The CGI Delivery Manager and development team have developed a good understanding of managing timber and have brought forward some exciting and innovative ideas. Retaining the existing database, developing and delivering on a modular basis, and running the old and new software in parallel has given us assurance and confidence moving forward.”

Stuart Balfour

Systems Manager
Forestry England

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