

# Performance management in practice

Making a performance management strategy real can be a painful process, but what it can yield in terms of improved management efficiency is worth the effort. Kelvin Stagg (right) of **Michael Page International** and John Simpson (left) of **Simpson Associates** tell Jim Banks that, even in a rapidly growing business, successful implementation can deliver sustainable gains.



Performance management is now one of the top three IT investment priorities in most major organisations, but implementation can be challenging. Sensing that the transition might be complex and arduous, some companies have remained cautious, but others – some leaders in their fields – have proven that with the pain comes substantial gain.

Among the more forward-thinking companies is professional recruitment consultancy Michael Page International, which is implementing a business intelligence (BI) and performance management platform from Cognos to deliver relevant and accurate company information to decision-makers across its entire global organisation.

Initially, Cognos 8 Controller replaced an in-house solution for consolidation and management reporting. By choosing a fully integrated solution from a single vendor Michael Page aims to enable its senior executives around the world to review and plan from a single set of data. This is no small achievement in a rapidly-growing business.

'Michael Page is a well-known business and since it was established in 1976 has had a consistent, organic, meritocratic model. This strategy of organic growth has kept us internally focused on process and systems development. Since 2003, our diversification strategy has picked up and we have grown rapidly,' says Kelvin Stagg, Group Financial Controller and Company Secretary at Michael Page.

Growth has indeed stepped up a gear. From 105 offices in 16 countries in 2003, the firm now has 166 offices in 28 countries, and it has diversified the types of business run through those offices dramatically. 'We have reduced our exposure to any one sector or country

– but we have increased the complexity of managing the business effectively and felt our internal systems could start to limit the speed at which we could expand,' Stagg explains.

Michael Page turned to Simpson Associates, a Platinum Partner of Cognos, an IBM company, and the first Cognos Accredited Services Partner in Europe, to work in support of the firm's extensive systems replacement programme by defining and delivering the performance management solution. A key goal was to standardise on a world-class business intelligence (BI) and performance management application that

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would leverage the company's investment in financial, operational and CRM applications, and maximise the value of the information assets by sharing them with all decision-makers throughout Michael Page.

'With greater complexity through diversification of the business there was more pressure on speed of execution. By moving to Cognos we will achieve the same speed in a more complex environment,' notes Stagg. 'When more information is available there is a risk of data blindness – lots of data, little information. Simpson Associates brought to life the vision of providing the right

information at the right time to make better decisions'

## Partnering for the future

Although Simpson Associates came in to address a specific point, discussions soon broadened to encompass a much wider view of performance management, including better planning, improved monitoring of key performance indicators and greater visibility of the growing business.

'As a trusted advisor in the early stages we listen and understand our client's business before we talk about solutions. We make a business case for performance management,' says John Simpson of Simpson Associates.

'Simpson helped us to see that BI is not just about finance issues and is not just for finance people,' Stagg remarks. 'It is about leveraging information throughout the organisation.'

This understanding and insight stems from Simpson's partnership approach. Through long-term relationships the company can see a project through the painful implementation stage and target sustained value. 'We entered into it knowing that it would not be a quick implementation, but a series of projects and, more importantly, a cultural change in how our organisation looks at information,' says Stagg.

The challenge is to bring the business along with the shift to performance management as it continues its rapid growth, but the compelling value behind the proposition makes the message easier to convey. ■

### Further information

Simpson Associates

Website: [www.simpson-associates.co.uk](http://www.simpson-associates.co.uk)