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“I wouldn’t hesitate to recommend Xicon, I was really impressed with the team.”

Sandra Green,
Learning and Development Manager,
Littlewoods Home Shopping Limited



With the help of Xicon, Littlewoods Home Shopping Ltd has implemented a database solution to set employee objectives, support regular performance appraisals and provide comprehensive reporting. Littlewoods Home Shopping is now able to match corporate and employee objectives across the whole organisation.

A company is often only as good as its people. For Littlewoods Home Shopping Ltd, properly appraising and motivating its workforce is vital for sustained business success. Thanks to a database system developed by Xicon, Littlewoods Home Shopping has introduced proactive employee performance management to support the company's business objectives.

Founded in Liverpool in 1924, Littlewoods is a privately-owned business purchased by LW Investments Limited from the Moores family in November 2002. Littlewoods Home Shopping is the company's catalogue and online operation selling over 40,000 products.

For Learning and Development Manager Sandra Green, performance appraisals were always time-consuming. Every employee's grade was sent by managers to directors, and then on to the Human Resources Department where staff would collate the grades, and chase individuals who had not responded.

"From a human resources perspective, the administrative workload was huge. That was a definite problem,"

said Sandra Green





The whole process required considerable manual effort involving word processing forms and re-keying into spreadsheets. Leaver and joiner updates added to the complexity- it took two people a week to collate information, and produce the reports and charts.

"I wanted to change the way people perceived performance management. They saw it as bureaucratic, time-consuming and a waste of effort. It was about creating a culture where people had clear objectives and clear feedback too," said Green.

It was time for some new thinking. The company's chief executive wanted to introduce a new performance management culture where employees had clearly agreed objectives and feedback on their performance. Board-level goals had to be cascaded down to influence individual objectives. An easy-to-use paperless solution was required, enabling managers to drive the appraisals process yet giving Human Resources a clear overview.

But time wasn't the only issue. The employee objective setting process was considered insufficient, appraisal interviews inconsistent and performance grades too open to subjective influences. Questionable results led to difficulties in managing career progression, and issues over identifying training needs. Discrepancies between employee performance and overall business results also put the whole process in doubt.



Any new system had to be web-enabled with a link to Human Resource's Oracle database. It also had to be flexible, simple to use and output the required reports. The supplier chosen to develop the system was Xicon (a preferred supplier to the Littlewoods Group) in February 2004 with a deadline of June.

"There was no way of knowing whether people had been set objectives, whether they were smart objectives, and whether the manager was spending time talking to their staff about their performance," said Green.

The tight timescales meant speeding up the off-site development work by taking an interactive approach rather than going through formal project stages. Xicon also provided 'train the trainer' skills transfer, with Littlewoods using the knowledge gained to train 500 managers in-house before going live. According to Green, Xicon "worked extremely hard" to get the new system delivered on time. A new Oracle 9i database was installed on existing hardware along with an integrated HTTP listener to support the web-based application. Xicon managed the full project from requirements capture to system implementation, and now provide a completely hosted and managed service.

perform

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Performance Update: January 2005

Value Code	Value Title	Value Type	Approval	Rating
V1-200CT04	Lead more	WINNING	✗	0/5
V2-200CT04	Speak more at meetings	CHAMPION	✓	5/5

Objective Setting: January 2005

Business Objectives | People Objectives | Leadership Objectives | Personal Objectives | Values

Value Objective Setting: V1-200CT04

Value Type: WINNING

Value Title: Lead More

Value Description: Contribute more to staff meetings

How will you demonstrate achievement?
By showing a project plan for a project that I would like to be involved in.

Choose your target date: 20/10/04

Buttons: Back, Update, Cancel

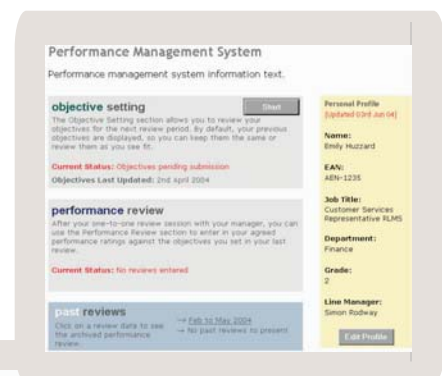
"Xicon were willing to pick up our brief and turn it round quickly and deliver on time. I was really impressed with that. And their customer focus was very good too," said Green.

Xicon: Improving Performance

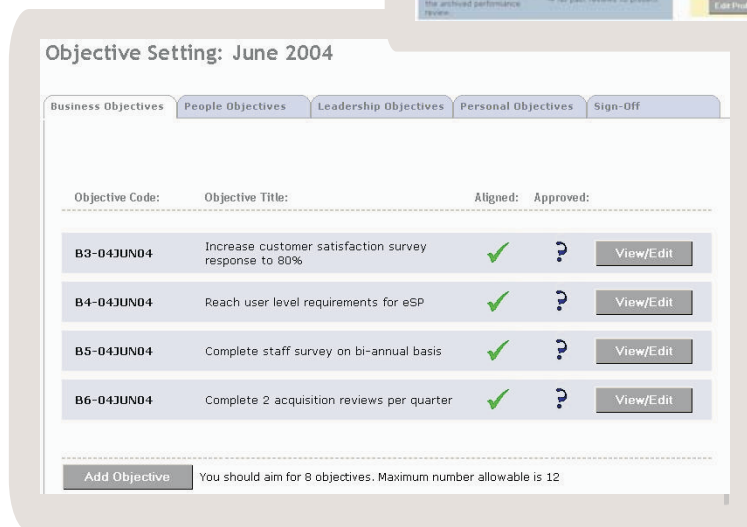
"The system forces the manager and staff member to have a discussion. It's a far more robust way of managing objectives," said Green. "The objectives setting screen forces you to put in measures and target dates for time-linked objectives. Because of the transparency between line manager and individual, performance reviews are much easier to carry out and individuals know what grade to expect."

The new web-based performance management system is accessed via the intranet. Working from the company's overall business objectives, managers and subordinates first set annual personal objectives, though these can be amended as necessary. Following each appraisal (the system usefully reminds when one is due), the individual confirms ratings and free-form comments, and then forwards the information to the line manager for approval.

Human Resources is also able to oversee the whole process with built-in checks to ensure tasks are carried out on time. The system's even-handed approach to performance management gives good confidence in the grading figures for individual, department, director or company. It also supports other methodologies including balanced scorecards and 360 degree feedback.



By October 2004, over 1,000 people were using the new system which offers proven performance and reliability. It has proved a highly popular tool as users feel it drives performance management in a very pro-active way with helpful prompts and checks. Confidential information is also kept secure with strict controls on who can view or update information. Browser-based graphing technology allows for quick looks and reports or more intensive investigation involving exported data.



KEY FACTS

Solution Summary

Employee performance management system based on an Oracle database with secure web-enabled access.

Software and Utilisation

- Number of Users: 1,000
- Oracle Software: Oracle Enterprise Edition database and Oracle Application Server

Key Benefits

- Reduces administration time
- Supports Performance Management methodologies
- Comprehensive reporting



"We now have an ability to track individual performance against organisational objectives. We can view by individual, team, department, and at director level against those objectives," said Green. "It's also given us better and easier reporting. People are now using performance management in the right way."

So what's the verdict from Human Resources on Xicon's performance?

The flexibility and simplicity of the new system is matched by Xicon's honest, questioning approach that doesn't try to oversell unnecessary functionality. Xicon is also creative and focused with an insightful view that comes from vendor independence.

Reorganisation is about to drive further changes for Littlewoods in the performance management system. These include e-mail alerting using workflow concepts but are also likely to see wider objective setting, links to self-assessment tools and feedback into corporate training plans. It looks like an invigorated performance management culture is here to stay.

"I wouldn't hesitate to recommend Xicon, I was really impressed with the team. You know exactly where you are because their project planning makes it very clear how long it's going to take and therefore how much it's going to cost," said Green.

About Xicon

Xicon was founded in 1991 as a systems integrator and IT solutions company. Xicon helps its customers maximise their business advantage by providing a total solution as a strategic technology partner. Xicon does this through exceptional service delivery, which is only possible due to the high quality of its people and the culture in which they operate.

For more information on Xicon's solutions, or to arrange a meeting with one of Xicon's Principal Consultants please contact Nancy Handley on 01925 248224.

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