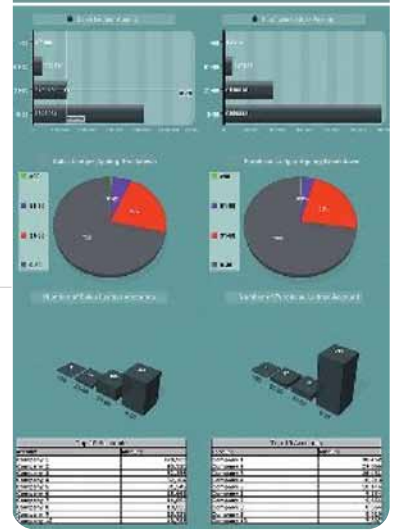


Sollertia's 'dashboard' indicators show a range of detailed financial data.



Accurate accounts

By adopting an outsourced management accountancy system, Astley Hire of Leigh has increased its efficiency and enabled itself to face challenging economic climate with confidence.

Until a year ago, Astley Hire used the services of an outside accountant to prepare its annual accounts, like so many other small to medium sized businesses. However, when the company became dissatisfied with the accuracy and efficiency of the service it was receiving, it sought an alternative provider.

"For some time we had also become aware of needing to ensure we maximised our own efficiency and planned as accurately as possible for the future to cope with the challenging economic conditions," says Stephen Dorricott, Director of Astley Hire which founded 43 years ago and employees 20 people.

"There was also a need for accurate and up-to-the minute management accounts in order to chart our future growth and make informed decisions. I have always kept our accounts myself, and I still

do as a kind of back up, but we ideally needed someone with specialist knowledge to at least confirm what I was doing. Moreover, being a family owned and run business, having the option of a disinterested outsider is, perhaps, even more necessary for us.



"We had already decided to replace our hire management software with Syrnix from Higher Concept Software, having been impressed by the functionality of the program when we saw it demonstrated at the Executive Hire Show last year. Also, shortly afterwards, I was talking to a human resources consultant and when I mentioned to him about our accounting frustrations, he mentioned an outsourced management accountancy service he had heard of, called Sollertia."

What particularly interested Stephen about Sollertia - which is the Latin word for skill - is that it was the brainchild of someone with specific hire industry experience. MD Andrew Mault was previously Group Accountant for the lifting gear hire specialist, LGH Group, and has also worked as a financial analyst with A-Plant. He has spent four years developing a web-based system that enables a company's accountancy data to be received and interpreted by a team of specialist 24 hours/day. Face-to-face meetings to discuss particular issues or developments can also be arranged.

"Sollertia utilises a specialised Sage ERP (enterprise resource planning) software called Accpac," says Stephen. "Now when we enter data into Syrnix, it is also sent via the internet to Sollertia's remote servers in Manchester. I can interrogate the information whenever I want to, in many different ways, and so can Sollertia's management accountancy team. The screen also presents you with a 'dashboard' type display, specially developed by the company, indicating key business parameters at a glance, such as debtor days, revenue details and forecasts. When a business is expanding, data like this is invaluable in controlling the rate of growth. And during a downturn it is perhaps even more important. We know where we stand at any given time in accounting terms, and we can generate meaningful results to 'what if' scenarios."

Andrew Mault says that "most companies do not realise this sort of outsourced service exists. Furthermore, Sollertia integrates with commonly used hire software systems. The typical small business could not afford to employ someone full-time to generate the detailed data that we can. We are now rolling out the concept as a franchise throughout the country and aim to establish a network of specialists who can provide the service locally."

Stephen Dorricott points out "it is not simply about cutting costs and reducing expenditure. In fact, we have kept buying for our fleet, including powered access machines such as Genie Z30/20NJ boom lifts, Niftylift 120T work platforms, and JLG M600JP 66ft boom, as well as general kit like Hilti breakers and other tools."

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Astley Hire has recently added more powered access machinery to its fleet.