

ELITE CASE STUDY

SJ BERWIN LLP

LONG-TIME ENTERPRISE FIRM BUILDS ON BENEFITS
WITH AN UPGRADE TO VERSION 3.8



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AN EASY TECHNOLOGY DECISION

SJ Berwin LLP, an international law firm with 600 lawyers and 1,125 total staff based in 12 offices, has used Elite for its financial and practice management system for nearly 15 years. Over that period, the organization has experienced tremendous growth and success with both fees billed and profits per partner comfortably listed in top 20 lists conducted by the legal press.

Over the years, SJ Berwin has been the beneficiary of several Elite Enterprise upgrades to help maintain its long history of ranking among the most profitable legal practices. According to Mike Giles, Finance Director, the key strengths of the firm's latest Enterprise platform was its firm-wide billing system in which anyone could record time on any matter from anywhere. It also enabled a one-firm practice management system in which data from all offices could be consolidated for good visibility on transactions—without the need of additional data mining tools.

With the latest release of Enterprise Version 3.8, the firm had an opportunity to enhance its platform and processes yet again. Specifically, Version 3.8 offered the capability to improve the speed and stability of the overall system and provided a platform to meet local reporting requirements of a global law firm.

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Mike Giles
Finance Director

“Upgrading to Enterprise was an easy decision for us at this point in our growth,” says Giles. “It offered a very economical path to provide additional functionality without having to completely switch out platforms. All our efforts for this upgrade, especially local tax compliance, will be valuable when we eventually transition to a new platform that can support longer-term growth.”

MEETING LOCAL TAX REQUIREMENTS EFFICIENTLY

The firm's ultimate objective of the 3.8 upgrade was to enable local offices to easily generate reports that complied with local tax and statutory requirements. At the same time, Giles and his team needed to roll up data in a central, consolidated fashion to meet UK gap accounting needs where the firm is headquartered.

Each office has had to maintain parallel general ledger (GL) systems that required double entry in Enterprise in order to sufficiently meet local tax requirements. For example, France has its own statutory chart of accounts, which dictates the format of the GL and its accounts. Without the enhanced Elite Global Release (EGR) component in Version 3.8, local offices were not able to generate reports in the format and with the detailed account balance data that were required. Furthermore, multiple currencies, languages and different year-end calendars added to the mounting local reporting challenges for the firm.

EGR is designed to handle multiple global operating units from a single database application with separate parameters for local currency, account structures, predefined postings and year-ends. Local accounting staff benefits from parallel posting features without the need for double entry.

“The functionality in EGR enables us to support different local tax obligations in a more streamlined fashion and will provide the firm with more control and visibility into statutory compliance,” adds Giles.

SJ BERWIN LLP

With 600 lawyers in 12 international offices, SJ Berwin delivers commercial legal advice to blue chip financial institutions, international companies and growth businesses.

GOAL

To consolidate the accounting needs of the firm on a centralized platform that enables local tax compliance while meeting UK accounting requirements.

WHY UPGRADE?

Enhanced functionality improves overall speed and stability of data and provides a platform to meet global reporting requirements.

BENEFITS

- More efficient nightly batching processes
- More confidence in reporting with higher level of data integrity
- More consistency of use among decentralized accounting staff

For EGR to be fully operational for the firm, a significant level of due diligence is required to understand the most current reporting needs for each office and to manage any data reconciliation issues when consolidating all systems into Enterprise. "Undertaking this exercise is extremely valuable to gain a deeper understanding of local accounting needs and how we can best leverage the functionality in the system now and in the future," adds Giles.

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ENHANCED SPEED AND STABILITY

As the firm expanded its international reach, the time window to complete nightly batch processing was shrinking. With a new office in Hong Kong, the firm was operating across an eight-hour time difference. Processing the time entry load, back-ups, and data warehouse updates that fed the firm's intranet was becoming too cumbersome to complete overnight. "If we were to open an office in the United States, we would not have any certainty of finishing our overnight routines in a reasonable amount of time," shares Giles. The accounting staff also experienced data balancing issues where summary tables did not always match.

Since the upgrade, Enterprise has been noticeably faster and can easily complete overnight processing functions. In addition, the staff no longer questions the integrity of the data. The speed of the system has increased the staff's overall efficiency and the stability of the data has provided greater confidence in the reports.

SUCCESSFUL UPGRADE REINFORCES CONSISTENCY

Giles considered a third party to help with the 3.8 implementation, but realized that he would need expertise from Elite at some point; besides, he simply did not want to manage another vendor. Moreover, the firm had worked with the Elite Consulting Group on past projects and created good synergy with the team.

For this project, the Elite team facilitated a Business Process Review designed to take a holistic approach of the firm's accounting system and current protocols. Giles and his team found the process to be very useful in identifying any inefficiencies in the system and rectifying them along with the upgrade process.

"We used the upgrade process as an opportunity to optimize our system configuration and enhance our protocols and procedures with best practices," says Giles. "The upgrade also enabled us to provide training that achieved consistency in the use of Enterprise for our entire accounting team."

Giles was very pleased with the upgrade process. "We effectively had a seamless upgrade. It didn't disrupt our staff; we had no downtime, no reconciliation issues and no bugs. We migrated over a weekend and on Monday morning, everything just worked. And the project was delivered on time and on budget," he says.

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