

Interview with a Customer

Customer

Glynn Harris
Technical Director
Cal Software
Lancashire, United Kingdom

Industry

An integrated business system provider working with customers to deliver both packaged and custom IT solutions. Cal Software has extensive experience in the delivery of Business-to-Business (B2B) solutions over the Internet and across a wide range of networked environments. Cal Software's core product provides solutions to the agriculture industry.

Challenge

Develop a solution that would reduce the cost of manual invoicing and cross selling in the agri-industry by allowing businesses to exchange data electronically and present trading capabilities in an eBusiness format.

Solution

Progress Professional Services were not only able to provide the name, strength and size of Progress, but also they found some other high speed partners who have expertise and a track record in some of the other technologies. Together, Cal Software and Progress Software provided all the necessary elements to win the contract.

“Without Progress and Professional Services standing in front with us on this particular First 4 Farming contract, we wouldn't have received that contract. And because of that, now we're starting to see additional business with people ringing us and asking us for demonstrations of our software. So, just in that alone, Professional Services has made a big difference to our business.”

Cal Software

First 4 Farming – the UK's agriculture consortium marketplace – was formed by prominent agricultural businesses. This community is comprised of more than 50% of the UK's grain, seed & feed producers, fertilizer manufacturers and distributors as well as agrochemical manufacturers who came together to develop an industry-wide standard for electronic trading through an industry exchange. Cal Software, together with Progress Software, was awarded the contract as part of a technology consortium following a stringent selection process managed by KPMG, which analyzed companies from niche agri-solution providers to international software companies.

We recently had the opportunity to interview Glynn Harris, Technical Director of Cal Software to hear more about this large First 4 Farming contract and how Progress was instrumental in that industry-changing win.

Q. What Progress applications have you / are you currently using?

A. We've used all of the Progress® products, ranging from the GUI 4GL systems, through WebSpeed®. We've used some of the out-server technologies, and recently we've been working with a SonicMQ and SonicXQ product set.

Q. How did you become involved with Professional Services?

A. Professional Services is something we've come across a number of times on various projects. More recently, we were given an opportunity to tender for a particularly large contract. The contract was for an organization called First 4 Farming. First 4 Farming was made up of nine major agricultural companies, typically in excess of 100 million pounds a year. When we looked at the bid, we knew we had some of the solution, but not all of the solution. We also understood that from a perception point of view, a company of our size, which isn't particularly large, wouldn't carry the weight of some of the other big names. Progress Professional Services not only were able to provide the name and the strength and size of Progress, but also they found some other high speed partners who have expertise and a track record in some of the other technologies.

Also recently, we were in a position where we developed a solution within 30 days and, without Professional Services being there, we wouldn't have achieved the final end date that we did.

Q. What types of things are you using Professional Services for?

A. Professional Services have provided us with a mix of services. Project management is one on the First 4 Farming project – they've also provided technical support and some sales support.

Q. What value has Professional Services provided to your organization?

A. Professional Services have enabled my company to do a number of things. Without

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Progress and Professional Services standing in front with us on this particular First 4 Farming contract, we wouldn’t have received that contract. The impact on our business cannot be underestimated because this one particular project has shaken the agriculture industry in the UK quite heavily. And out of that, now we’re starting to see additional business with people ringing us and asking us for demonstrations of our software. So, just in that alone, Professional Services has made a big difference to our business.

Q. Can you give us a quick overview of what the First 4 Farming project entails?

A. The First 4 Farming project was really designed to deliver a whole host of commercial benefits. The challenge really was to reduce the cost of manual invoicing and cross selling by exchanging data electronically. They also wanted to present trading capabilities in an eBusiness format, and that was achieved through the ePortal element – which is what Cal has worked on predominantly. In terms of how it’s affected the business in the UK – the global element within the UK – they have now started to cause other smaller companies to get involved in the project. And through that, generated a whole host of new business. People have started to question their existing systems and how they’ll react over the next two to five years, which is excellent news for a company like ourselves.

Q. What were some of the critical issues within the First 4 Farming project?

A. Some of the critical elements within the First 4 Farming project were guaranteeing that the messages, these electronic documents that are sent from place to place, actually arrive. These documents are typical of invoices and orders. They’re critical business documents and if any of them are lost, that not only impacts the business, but it also impacts the quality and the belief in the system. This is really a first move towards trying to educate farmers and some of the small suppliers and to move them to more of an eCommerce based approach – ultimately, dropping down costs.

Q. When positioning yourself for the First 4 Farming bid, was it helpful to have some Progress success stories?

A. Yes, Cal Software had the advantage of being a long-standing supplier of computer solutions, software solutions to that sector. We were able to demonstrate our expertise of the market, which was quite key to the First 4 Farming organization. What Progress was able to do though, is bring together people who have track records of demonstrable size – which not only explained and gave a clear demonstration of the Progress software, but also showed it in action.

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