Asta Powerproject Case Study: J Breheny Contractors

BREHENY GETS IT RIGHT FROM THE START - WITH ASTA POWERPROJECT

Setting the right expectations, providing realistic targets, and having a transparent and well managed programme of works are vital, right from the start, to ensure project success. J Breheny Contractors is one of the largest privately owned Civil Engineering companies in the UK. With a high regard for customer care it has repeatedly proven its ability to complete high-standard projects on time and within cost. Breheny believes that using Asta Powerproject for the lifecycle of its projects, starting at tender stage, allows it complete control to respond to changing situations, to be proactive rather than reactive in the development of a project, and to be totally project-focused.

"Recording a project against a programme is an important part of any construction project. We have been using Asta Powerproject for three years now; we use it at tender stage and throughout the entire lifecycle of the project to completion. It has completely filled our needs," Robin Percy

With more than 40 years' experience Breheny's projects range from infrastructure, groundworks and highways, to remediation, marine works and coastal defence for a client base including house developers, commercial industries, major retailers, government authorities and local councils. One of Breheny's unique strengths is its policy to carry out as much work as possible using its own trained and tested resources, like its 3000 plus items of plant and 400 trained and experienced staff and operatives.

▶ SWITCHING TO ASTA POWERPROJECT FOR A MORE COMPREHENSIVE PROJECT MANAGEMENT TOOL

Robin Percy, who has been working with Breheny for 32 years – his experience spanning site engineer, site agent, and project manager all the way through to planning – is responsible for producing the programmes at tender stage, along with his team. A proficient user of Asta Powerproject, he is also able to provide training and support for others using the software. Robin explains why they switched from their incumbent software to Asta Powerproject.

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"When our hand was forced to change from our existing project management tool, we chose Asta Powerproject to replace it, and we have not looked back. We had been using a mixture of MSP and Pertmaster. Then Oracle discontinued its support of Pertmaster and switched to Primavera. We looked at using v8, the latest version, but found that it couldn't save as v7, so everyone else would need to upgrade. It was then that I took on the task of looking at alternative options, and one of those was Asta Powerproject. While we were working as a subcontractor on a very large motorway project, the main contractor was using Asta Powerproject, so this gave us the opportunity to get to know it. That's all it took. We invested in some licences for that project and then it went from there.

We decided to adopt it as our preferred software, because we could manage everything we needed in one tool, including tender stage," said Robin.

▶ THE BENEFITS OF GETTING IT RIGHT AT TENDER STAGE

Creating a realistic programme of works is essential at tender stage – failure to do so can expose the client to poor quality, lead to disputes and erode professionalism. Not every company has the capability to provide the depth of detail and accuracy that Breheny provides to its customers.

"The construction industry has changed a lot in the past 10 years," said Robin. "For a potential customer, although cost implications are important especially in a time of economic difficulty, it is no longer just about cost – clients now want to know a lot more detail about the project, the build, the time frames and the materials. So Breheny aims to produce a programme for every tender, whether the client demands it or not; it is a good way of checking by producing a resourced programme and comparing it against what the estimator has priced. It is often a requirement, but if it isn't, we do it anyway because it gives confidence in how we will do the job."

"When we are tendering, we use Asta Powerproject to envisage how we will carry out the project, it can be groundworks, landfill or many other works. I work with the estimator to produce a tender stage construction programme, taking client requirements into account and any constraint – no two jobs are the same in civil engineering. Then we resource it with number of men, machines and so on, then compare it to what the estimator has just priced. Asta Powerproject allows us to see any differences and we can discover why there are differences. We can then eliminate mistakes and it gives us a realistic picture of how long it will take to construct the work and confirm the pricing."

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"Even if subcontractors are doing just a single job, we build that into our programme. With Asta Powerproject we can filter out their requirement and give them a programme of their own work, and if they aren't using the same software, it's not a problem, in Asta Powerproject we can save the file as something else, or give them .pdf or a printout – we like that capability."

"We also produce a cost plan for that tender stage – not a cashflow – that is different," continued Robin. "The cost plan is about product spend for each month from a cost point of view – Asta helped us to write a macro enabling us to export information from a resourced programme into Excel. We can fully populate this with projected costs and we can manage our bottom line – we can give the cost plan to surveyors and site managers for example and we are able to monitor costs of the job as well as what we are being paid."

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enhance it by using histograms to give clients the cashflow forecasts that they want – it's simple to do using the software and clients like it, it gives them more information and more confidence in us."

▶ IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGES UPFRONT SAVES TIME AT CONSTRUCTION STAGE

With a more rounded, more capable piece of software, Robin is better able to identify in the tender programme any challenges or issues that might be thrown up at construction phase. "It's not just construction that is involved in our tender programme," he explained, "we have to factor in the companies in the supply chain. Will a third party be ready in time to come to site? Will the third party have the materials ready on time? Will they be delivered on time? On a broad basis we have to factor the time scales and resources needed into the programme for all these things to happen, we also call in the expertise of the site manager to verify them – Asta Powerproject lets us flag any potential conflicts, then we hand over to site and it becomes their task to make sure everything happens in the right order."

▶ THE FEATURES OF ASTA POWERPROJECT THAT REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Robin identified the features he likes about Asta Powerproject and offers some advice on how to make the most of them:

"Sometimes clients specify a particular software. If I'm asked to produce a programme, for example, in MS Project, I usually produce it in Asta Powerproject first, because of its superior functionality and ease of use, then save it as an MSP file for the client. That's what I like about Asta Powerproject; it is interchangeable with other software, so I can save it and someone can open it up in their software and everyone is happy. It just works. My advice would be to always try it first to make sure it is compatible. Other software

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will have limitations, so just use fairly standard views. For example, split bars will allow you to have multiple tasks in the same line – MSP doesn't let you do that. Asta Powerproject will let you format it a way that keeps it compatible with other software."

I find Asta Powerproject very useful and easy to use, and I think we use it more to its capabilities. The demands placed on us to provide so much detail at tender stage have intensified over recent years and Breheny likes to be completely thorough and give the client exactly what is required. We have more confidence in the tender we are producing because we use Asta Powerproject.

Once you have used Asta Powerproject, and have got used to using it, you will find it is a very valuable tool. You will discover the best way to let it do the thinking for you – for example, in a populated programme, by using histograms and exporting as an .xl file, it will calculate usage of resources for you.

We like a lot of the features in Asta Powerproject, specifically multiple bars in one line being able to link from anywhere in that bar to anywhere in another bar – this is better than anything I have used before.

The multiple time zone features enables us to do different timescales for different parts of the programme. An example might be a job where you are working for 6 weeks then off for 6 weeks. In Asta Powerproject you don't have to show the gaps, you can squeeze the timeframe together so there is one continuous line of information; it is this scaling of time zones that helps to make the programme easier to follow.

We also like the colour coding feature and the filtering ability. It is particularly useful when you have a number of subcontractors or traders, you can give each one a task bar of a different colour, this helps you see easily where there is

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continuity or overlap. You can then filter on these, making it even easier to manage and it gives you a realistic programme of works."

▶ ASTA DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS US IN JUST THE WAY WE NEED

"We use Asta Powerproject in a very specialised way, it is very good at, and geared around, complex construction projects, but we also use it for more simplified operations where a programme might be only 100 lines long. We have developed the software in conjunction with Asta Development to meet our needs, and following some one to one mentoring, Asta wrote macros for us so that we can provide in-house training and support ourselves. We do send people to Asta's premises for bespoke courses, and sometimes Asta comes into our premises to do course tailored to our needs. But it's good to know that we also have the ability to do most of it ourselves and even go out to site to give support there in real time."

"What is a really good about Asta's support is that it is based in the UK – they work the same hours as we do. You don't have to think about what the time is in the US for example, it's easy just to pick up the phone, and they are very helpful and extremely responsive."

"It's a big investment to implement new planning software and to use it throughout an organisation. We talked to Asta and found the most beneficial option for us. We chose to have network licences or multipleuser licencing. This means that in the office you can have, for example, 6 people using the software at once, and anyone can use it. For the people on site, or working remotely, we have standalone licences – Asta makes the options flexible for you depending on your requirement."

"Getting senior management buy in was not an issue – I had to make a recommendation and looked at the cost. The CEO of Asta came in to meet us himself, and we negotiated with him. This gave our senior management complete confidence in purchase."

"Uptake was good, we trained a set of people then we could spill out and train others. With a number of full-time planners, construction mangers and site agents, they all needed different levels tuition and had different levels of user capability. We have incorporated it as part of our company mentoring scheme where new recruits coming through and receive training in every department. Using Asta Powerproject we can show them the process from tender to construction."

"Every two years or so Asta has its National User Forum and local user groups in between. What is good is that at the end of each session we are asked about what we the users would like to see introduced. They are constantly developing their software around their users – this is what we really like this about Asta, helping us to do our jobs better."

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▶ ABOUT ASTA DEVELOPMENT

Asta Development is a leading international developer of project, portfolio and resource management software which provides solutions for managing any size and any type of project.

Since its launch in 1988, the company's core product, **Asta Powerproject**, has evolved and improved driven by regular feedback from users and using the latest technologies available.

Having proved its capabilities over the years on high profile projects throughout the world such as Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam: Jumeirah Park, Dubai; The London Eye and The Shard in London, The Space Shuttle, New Orleans: Ipswich

Motorway, Brisbane and The Reichstag, Berlin, **Asta Powerproject** is now used by thousands of planners in a wide variety of industry sectors in the UK, Europe, Asia Pacific and the USA. Companies large and small are using **Asta Powerproject**, as well as a growing range of new software products from Asta, to successfully plan and manage projects of all sizes.

In the UK, Asta Development supports customers directly from its offices in Oxfordshire and Shropshire with a comprehensive range of services including consultancy, training and technical support. Outside the UK, it

has a network of partners and distributors who supply, train and support customers in 20 countries and in seven different languages.

Asta Development is a part of Eleco plc, a holding company focused on software development and services for architectural, engineering and construction industries. The company is listed on the London Stock Exchange's Alternative Investment Market (AIM).
More information about Asta Development and its products can be found at www.astadev.com and information about Eleco plc can be found at www.eleco.com.

▶ ABOUT J BREHENY CONTRACTORS

Formed in 1963, Breheny is one of the largest privately owned Civil Engineering Companies in the UK, and enjoys an excellent reputation with its clients, partners and supply chain. With a high regard for customer care and support it has repeatedly proven its ability to complete projects on time,

within cost, and to a high standard. As a local contractor with more than 40 years' experience it has successfully integrated with local communities and businesses. It employs local people who have a commitment to the business and to the communities it serves.

Its track record demonstrates how this

integration and commitment assists it to deliver projects which enhance the reputation of all parties involved, provide best value to the client and local community, and are financially profitable for J Breheny Contractors.

For more information visit
http://www.breheny.co.uk/

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