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EUREKA REAL ASSETS BUILDS AN ACTIVITY-BASED WORKSPACE WITH OBT'S COMMUNICATE ANYWHERE

➔ Creating space that is flexibly shared among employees to encourage collaboration

➔ Staff satisfaction has increased, as has efficiency both inside and outside the office

➔ The new working environment is also helping to attract and retain high quality staff

When Eureka Real Assets opened its doors a little over a decade ago, few could have predicted that the privately-owned firm would establish itself as one of Australia's top ten wholesale fund managers quite so quickly. Dedicated exclusively to wholesale and institutional investors, Eureka manages single account mandates and pooled investment vehicles totalling in excess of $5 billion in real estate assets, as well as a debt vehicle designed to fund building environmental upgrades.

From the very beginning, the firm's founding partners agreed Eureka required a solid, professional IT foundation. Quentin Shaw, Director, Eureka Funds Management, explains, "We started off as a group of five people with complementary backgrounds in financial services and real estate, but none of us were from IT. We needed to establish a business with institutional-grade services to attract institutional clients, therefore we had to have a high quality, robust IT infrastructure. Also, it's integral to our financial services licence to have appropriate IT back-up processes, proper redundancy systems, and reliability.

From day one emails had to work and at the very least we had to have the reliability and level of services that a large institution would have."

Rather than incur the upfront expense and stress of purchasing then managing hardware and software, the firm engaged the services of OBT, one of Australia's most experienced hosting companies.

"The attraction was the high quality of service OBT offered. They offered the enterprise-grade services we were after, right from day one. The hosted service also meant scalability, so we weren't going to be constrained in our growth. If we would have had to buy a server for five people, it would have lasted only a couple of years. As a start-up business we expected to grow quite rapidly," Shaw adds.

Over the next decade, management's optimism was borne out. Eureka Funds Management grew in terms of client numbers, assets, staff and reputation. In addition to its Sydney headquarters, a new office was opened in Brisbane.

Rethinking requirements with a refit

Not long after Eureka's twelfth birthday, the managing partners decided to undertake a major office refit. Shaw recognised this was an opportunity to update facilities and consolidate floor space. He notes, "The needs of a company that was now 12 years old were very different to those of a company just starting out. Our basic rationale was to modernise and improve the work environment, and to improve the front of house for visitors." By becoming more efficient in the usage of space, the firm would also be able to relinquish 220 square metres of floor space.

Key to the refit was a review of Eureka's IT requirements, including a look at user needs and devices. In acknowledgement of current trends in work practices, the firm decided to replace desktop computers with mobile devices. Shaw approached OBT for advice regarding the transition

and OBT provided purchasing assistance, configuration and deployment services that resulted in all staff being equipped with Microsoft Surface tablets.

Creating Activity-Based Workspace

With the question of user devices solved, discussion turned to the potential for more flexible, mobile work practices through the implementation of an Activity Based Workspace (ABW).

ABW is an increasingly popular approach to designing workspaces. It involves creating environments where space is flexibly shared among employees to encourage collaboration. Rather than sitting at an assigned desk or cube, employees in ABW environments are free to choose to work wherever they desire. That could mean using a collaboration space populated by lounges and coffee tables, or working at a standing desk. Depending on the nature of the day's tasks, the employee may choose to work from home or from a nearby coffee shop. Well-known ABW practitioners in Australia include the Commonwealth Bank, Microsoft, Macquarie Bank, NAB and KPMG.

The technology requirements

To create the infrastructure essential to support ABW, Shaw turned once again to OBT. "We had a strong view of where we wanted to go so we went to OBT and asked them to set up and configure whatever we needed to make ABW work. We wanted them to realise the vision, to bring together the technologies and services that would enable ABW to become a reality."

Having already equipped employees with mobile devices, the most pressing technology considerations included establishing a Voice over IP (VOIP) communications system so employees could answer their phones and access messages from any location, collaborative tools to make the most of the new environment, and the provision of remote system access for users.

Getting started

OBT recommended replacing Eureka's existing telephony system with Communicate Anywhere, a hosted Skype for Business solution. The system combines all of Eureka's communications needs including enterprise telephony, instant messaging, presence, conferencing into a single system that delivers a consistent experience across computers, browsers, telephones and mobile phones.

Next, Shaw sought OBT's help in sourcing and deploying a mobile app, tablets and other technology tools to create a meeting room booking system. "The system is incredibly simple. It uses a calendar app to create an electronic booking system, so anyone standing outside a meeting room can see when the room will be busy, when it's next available, who's in the meeting room now and how long that meeting has to go," Shaw says.
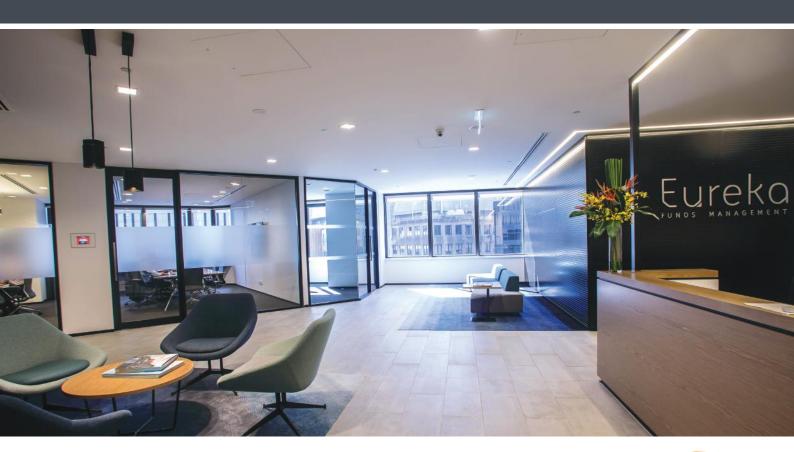
Keeping the office running

All of these projects had to be carried out by OBT without impinging on Eureka's ability to conduct business. Shaw says most of the work was scheduled to occur over the Christmas holiday break.

"At this time we were handing back 200-plus square metres of space. What we needed to do was move everything out of the existing office into an adjoining office, set it up so we would be fully running, then strip out the space we'd just emptied, refit it and move back in. All while maintaining phone systems, the WiFi and host environment. What was crucial was the ability to manage relocation of the communications room, switching hardware, modems and so on, while continuing to operate live. This was probably one of the biggest exercises we faced but it resulted in significant cost savings for the business."

A more collaborative future

SInce the transformation, staff at Eureka have settled into the ABW environment. Staff satisfaction has increased, as has efficiency thanks to the ability to work more effectively inside and outside the office. The more modern working environment is also helping Eureka to attract and retain high quality staff.

Shaw credits OBT's advice and services as essential contributions to the success of Eureka's ABW experiment. "Crucial to any significant change in IT systems is the ability to do the right thinking up-front. It's far easier to think in advance than to try to change things after they've been implemented. OBT advised us on the best way to approach the project and sourced the hardware and software to make it happen. The result of their efforts is a more pleasant working environment at Eureka."

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