

## Sapphire Case Study: R O Group



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**SUNSYSTEMS**



S Graham Rowlandson & Co. Ltd was established in 1932 by Sir Stanley Graham Rowlandson, a Chartered Accountant. In his capacity as an accountant, he was soon keeping the books of his father's property interests and went on to buy his own shop in 1933 – this was the start of the commercial undertaking that would be known as the Rowlandson Organisation.

The organisation continues to have ambitious growth plans and an entrepreneurial culture after 75 years. Operating under the mantle of the RO Group, the organisation is now involved in property development and investment, and residential lettings and management, as well as holding a commercial property portfolio.

Financial Controller Bernard O'Neill joined the group 8 years ago to find SunSystems Version 4 in place. The solution had been implemented in the late 1990s by another SunSystems reseller and it had become apparent that as the RO Group was growing, the way that they used SunSystems was inefficient and time consuming. Bernard said "Like many property based companies, the RO Group is run on a multi-company basis. Our main problem was one of consolidating the figures at the end of the financial year; this led to re-input of data from SunSystems onto spreadsheets for further analysis."

There was a requirement for simplification of the whole finance function without having to reinvent the wheel, so the logical decision was taken to upgrade from SunSystems Version 4 to Version 5. Bernard said "We already used and liked SunSystems, and therefore saw no reason to completely change the system; the solution is able to link and interface well with other software used within the organisation including Propman from Grosvenor Systems, Earnie Payroll and the SunSystems Vision reporting tool, which is important to us. The Group structure is quite complex and SunSystems is a good fit. The key driver for moving to SunSystems 5 was to shorten the whole finance process from input to reporting, as well as providing a more user-friendly user interface. SunSystems 5 with Vision 6 was our preferred solution."

In addition, the finance team felt they were not getting the required level of service from their existing SunSystems provider and took the opportunity to visit potential future business partners at the Softworld Finance and Accounting exhibition in London.

During the initial phases of identifying the right business partner Bernard said "Sapphire knew what they were talking about, understood what we wanted and didn't promise us the universe. We are quite pro-active in the way we get involved with our software at the RO Group, so we laid out our requirements and agreed a programme of "want-to-do" versus "what-can-be-done". We found that Sapphire supported us whilst still allowing us the freedom to direct what we wanted and where we wanted to end up."

Commenting on the decision taken to work with Sapphire Bernard said "As an accountant I am keen to get the best value for my money and Sapphire ask a fair price, particularly in comparison to some of the other partners that we looked at, as well as in relation to other software solutions.



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It is important to look at the costs of using the product and the associated maintenance costs, not just the price of the licence.”

During the implementation Bernard was very impressed with the availability, cooperation and overall level of service from Sapphire, saying “It’s always nice to feel special over these things – so often you are sent a disk and just told to get on with it. All business should have the personal touch.”

He goes on to say “Once we had agreed our requirements, we agreed a timeframe which included training for key members of staff, who would in turn train the rest of the team. The ease of implementation was a key aspect in our decision to upgrade to SunSystems Version 5.”

Now that the RO Group has been working with Sapphire for some time Bernard observes “It is very easy to deal with Sapphire – our working relationship is much better than with our previous partner. The Support team is excellent: we get a swift response and items are dealt with quickly if it is possible to do so. If not, our Account Manager is very good at keeping us informed as to the status of our enquiry.”

The feedback from the finance team is that SunSystems is operationally easy to use, its analysis capabilities are adaptable to meet specific requirements and integrates well with their other systems.

Bernard adds “The team finds that the whole system works well. They are key to me and I know if they are unhappy with the system they will let me know. We operate a system of multi-tasking whereby everyone is able to do everyone else’s job; in order to do this the team train each other. Because they all understand the operation they seem to find training others quite easy.”

To others looking to implement a financial accounting solution Bernard advises “Do some research so you know what you want before you go looking. Don’t just choose a system for now: look forward to where your business is going and what you want for the future. It is also worth checking on the long term support of the product. SunSystems was right for our business when we implemented it, and continues to be right today. We are excited to learn there is a new release of SunSystems 5, and look forward to reviewing this in the near future.”

The programme of development that the RO Group has is currently on course and, looking ahead, Bernard intends to produce full Statutory Accounts directly from SunSystems through Microsoft Word.

Lucy Roberts, Account Manager at Sapphire concludes “SunSystems is a perfect fit for the property sector, as it easily integrates with the wide variety of front office solutions on offer in this diverse sector. In addition its in-depth analysis and reporting capabilities allow it to adapt quickly to changes in legislation that smaller accounting packages are unable to keep pace with. For organisations that want their financial information to work harder for them SunSystems along with the Vision reporting tool can provide a greater insight into operational efficiency. It is great to see the solution bringing improved efficiency to the RO Group and we look forward to continuing this in the future.”