

CROWNING GLORY AT EDINBURGH CITY COUNCIL



Introduction

In September 1998, City of Edinburgh Council was the first organisation to install the newly launched Open Options Employee Management System from Crown Computing Limited. Open Options replaced the collection of outmoded time clocks being used around the council's 20 locations and allowed employees to register their attendance at any building.

Opportunity

When Lothian Regional Council and Edinburgh District Council merged in April 1996, to form the City of Edinburgh Council, the variety of electronic and manual clocking systems in use could not cope with the movement of people following merging of departments. Continual failure of the ageing equipment, resulting in increased manual adjustments and escalating maintenance costs, prompted the Council to rationalise its T&A systems.

"With around 2,500 council employees based at 20 plus buildings, spread around Edinburgh and surrounding districts, all using their own clocking system, a centralised employee management system was essential," recalls Kehler Kuhbor, Project Manger IT Services & Finance. "We looked for a single supplier whose system allowed staff to register at any terminal, not only their base-office clock, as this would eliminate the need to raise a manual exception report every time they went to another building on council business".

Solution

Essentially the T&A system had to monitor and control the Council's flexible working hour scheme, with the ability to produce absence statistics

and other management enabling information. It also needed to be compatible with the Council's corporate personnel, payroll and T&A systems, transferring information and updating other packages automatically.

"Our main technical criteria was that the database and platform had to be OPEN for future enhancement," stresses Kehler Kuhbor. Although, essentially a BETA test site for its new Open Options product, Crown Computing won the contract against stiff competition from six other suppliers. Assessment was made by a panel of evaluators including Kehler Kuhbor, Lindsey Gallanders, Senior Employee Relations Officer, Personnel Management Services Division of Corporate Services, and four departmental administrators. "Our raft of parameters were prioritised in the order of technical ability, including year 2000 compliance, usability and friendliness, flexibility, reliability and finally value for money," recalls Lindsey Gallanders.

Kehler continues, "a true client/server system, operating on Windows NT, fed by a MS SQL server, Open Options allows us to tie-in with and make better use of, our other software tools e.g. PowerPoint, GQL, Excel etc.

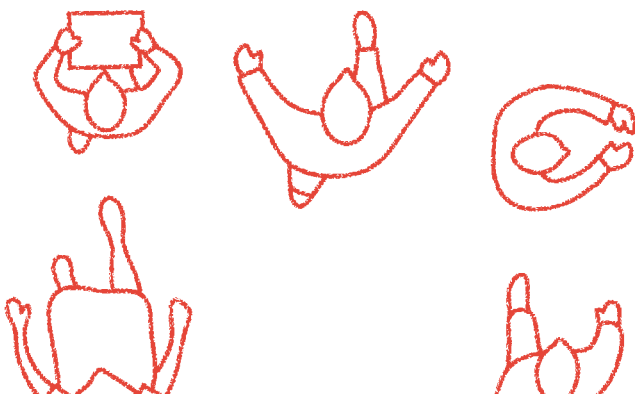
"We were impressed by Crown's previous expertise on the AS400 platform which was brought to bear on the functionality built-in to the new Open systems package," recalls Kehler Kuhor. "Written in 32-bit Visual C++, the latest industry standard, Open Options is a user-friendly, state-of-the-art, employee management software package. We took an early decision to opt for a WAN client/server solution as it minimised traffic on the network by processing data at the central server/database and passing only the requested information to the user's PC."

"Although not the cheapest to purchase, the Crown Open Options system was selected because it represented the best long term package value for money. When fully installed maintenance costs will be reduced drastically, with the total bill being less than half what we now pay for only six departments," said Kehler.

Service

"The service we have received from Crown is impeccable. They are amenable to incorporating changes to suit our methods of operation. For example our concept of up-to-the-minute 'real time' enquiry is on that day, but Crown's was close of business the night before. The software was quickly revised to conform to our needs."

Each department within the Council has more than one location. The first major site, Chesser House went live in October 1998, followed by the new HQ building Wellington Court in High Street, St Giles St, McDonald Road and City Chambers in February, making a total of 1,700 employees on stream. The remaining 800 or so, employees spread around various sites, will be implemented by early Spring. Approximately 150 staff are allocated per terminal, usually one per floor, or building for the smaller satellite sites.



Key Benefits

• Reduction of exception reports

"Even though we have only been running Open Options for six months, we can already clearly see the improvements. As users can clock in at any location, there has been a marked reduction in the number of adjustments implemented as the system now only shows an exception if a problem or mis-clocking has occurred. This element alone has reduced administration from a full-time job for around 16 departmental administrators to two hours per day, freeing them for more interesting work and speeding up the employee management role."

• Meeting Function Key

A facility which aids both Health & Safety rules and management control is the ability to program keys on the terminal to register specific functions. By allocating a key on the Crown terminal for registering meetings, staff can record off the site and back in again at another building.

• Infinite work patterns

"A key feature of the Open Options software was its ability to monitor an infinite number of work patterns allowing us to give part-time and job-share employees greater scope to their hours."

• More information on terminal

By pressing a function key on the terminal employees can interrogate the system to display their current balance. This enables them to manage their time more effectively.

• Pre-book absence

"An administrative time saver is the facility to book time off in advance, by entering the appropriate absence code. This is particularly useful for monitoring day release students, as we can allocate time for an entire term. We can also pre-allocate holiday and other set absences."

Other benefits

The ability to update throughout the whole system, if adding a new section or changes to standard clocking times, is also time saving. Codes, rather than figures, can be used to input standard times. The 'Scratchpad' software allows in-depth personal parameters about each employee to be held e.g. qualifications, training etc.

• Screens

"The Open Options screen layout is far superior to its competitors, being a user-friendly, informative, but uncluttered, attractive display."

• Management Reports

"Eventually we will be using the information generated to produce in-depth absence statistics, allowing us to compare departmental performances and provide an insight into absence trends. This will enable us to highlight and deal with any problem areas for project management and longer term development."

• Training

"I can honestly say we were expecting nightmarish problems when the system went live, but this was not the case. Crown's training was excellent, and much easier than we anticipated."

• Installation

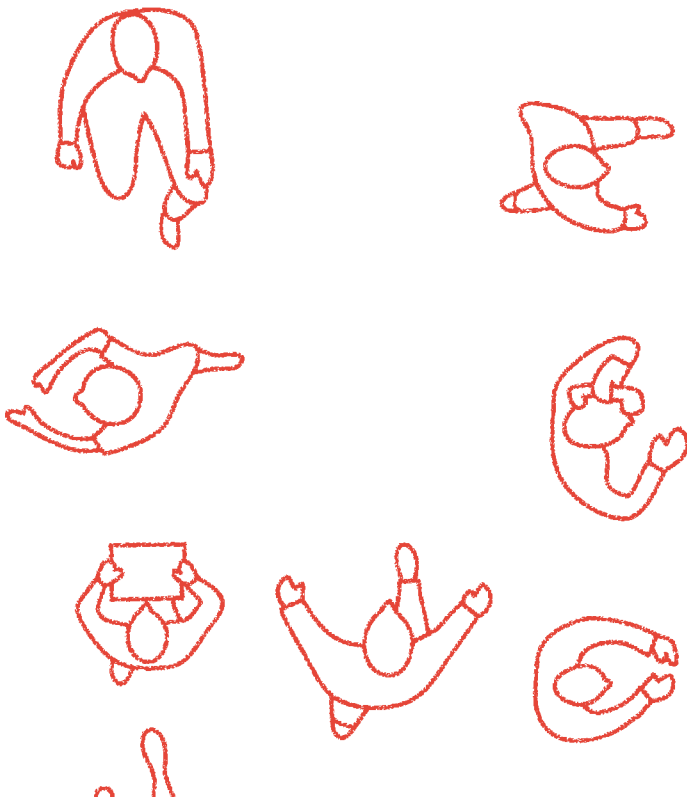
"We are really happy with the overall project, apart from a few minor hiccups, which Crown resolved immediately, everything went extremely smoothly."

• Future

"The purchase of Open Options Fleximodule is only the first brick in the wall of corporate systems, when it is interfaced with our personnel, payroll and recharge records it will allow managers to have an overall picture of individual's records, highlighting best practices and indicating problem areas for attention."

Summary

"The beauty of the Open Options software is that it is totally open enabling us to utilise whatever other packages we have. With Open Options there are no more time sheets and adjustments, staff just swipe in and out. More importantly the system went in on budget and on time, and it meets all our needs, especially clocking in at any location. The Council can now maintain and manage its resources better, implementing rules and regulations more tightly."



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