

Property Owner & Developer Case Study

Helen Hawke
Accounts and
Administration Manager
Robert Hitchins Limited

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Robert Hitchins Limited

Robert Hitchins is a property owner and development company with a portfolio of 12 commercial estates with about 150 tenants. We have the full range of properties comprising office blocks, retail units, some residential and brownfield industrial estates. Originally we managed our properties using Excel, Sage and the Axim construction package, which met our needs reasonably well at the time. However, as the company grew and adopted a strategy of expansion into commercial estates, we needed a more sophisticated system to help us in the intensive management of our estates.

The main requirements for us in selecting a system were firstly that there should be a single point of entry for all data; secondly that the accounting function was fully integrated with property management; and thirdly that the system should be flexible enough to allow us to operate both as a property owner and as an agent. In selecting a system, we contacted all the main suppliers with our requirements, and their response or lack of it made it clear what level of service we could expect. Grosvenor's Propman system met all our requirements and we bought the full system in November 2001.

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INTEGRATED PROPERTY MANAGEMENT & FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING SOFTWARE

www.grosvenorsystems.com

T: +44 (0)207 378 8358 F: +44 (0)207 378 8355 E: info@grosvenorsystems.com
Unit A 7 Leathermarket Street London SE1 3FB



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Integrated accounts were absolutely key, and not many of the packages we looked at had the required functionality. Propman provides full accounting functionality including, of course, automatic rent invoicing, extensive cost analysis and recovery and service charge reconciliation – all of which we have found to be the best features of the system. There is a lot of flexibility in Propman; it is multi-layered and very logical to navigate.

The structuring of the system has to be done by the user with Grosvenor’s support, and it is important to think through how you want the system to be structured before you start up. We knew before we started how the nominal ledger was going to look, and it has worked well. We went live with one estate of 17 properties and 50 tenants just six weeks after we purchased the system. It was crucial to us to go live on a certain date, so we did enough to get the sales ledger up and running and then followed on with the purchase and nominal ledgers, which took four months in total. That we were able to go live as quickly as we did was due to a large extent to the support we received from Grosvenor.

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The logic of the system makes it easy to use and our four users were able to use the system after five days of training. Propman is the company’s sole product and they are very proactive in continually updating and developing it. We receive several small upgrades two or three times per year and one major upgrade annually which incorporates users’ suggestions. We plan to develop our use of the system, possibly through linking it to our corporate accounting system and also by investigating the purchase order, insurance and valuation modules which we don’t use at the moment.