

Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School Secures Best Value Approach

Educational establishments within the public sector have a number of key challenges facing them and procurement efficiency is one area that is seeing particular attention. With Gordon Brown's demand for huge procurement savings and the call for joined up government on the back of the Gershon report, it is the role of e-procurement that has hit the top of the corporate agenda.

Information Technology plays a pivotal role within education establishments but the debate no longer focuses on the quality and diversity of the systems that are implemented, that is a given. Rather it is a case of getting the best-priced products delivered in the shortest possible time. Furthermore, how does education service maintain these high-end systems given the user demands placed upon them? And what about managing multiple suppliers either on or off tender?

It is allied educational facilities within the private sector, where the focus is on business goals, that are leading the education environment towards best practice, best value IT procurement for increased operating efficiency.

One such independent organisation is Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School (Habs Boys), where an entrepreneurial approach has seen the implementation of a structured IT purchasing process to maximise man hours and stretch the reach of budgets. This prestigious school's IT department has embraced e-procurement as part of a more efficient purchasing strategy.

A year ago, the IT department implemented The IT Index, a sophisticated e-procurement hub that lists over 100,000 products from over 1,200 manufacturers by best price and availability within a secure online purchasing environment.

The IT team now uses the solution to purchase all peripherals, hardware and software from USB's to servers and keyboards.

IT Manager Richard Izzard believes the solution is saving a day a week in man-hours as a result of the improved purchasing process.

Richard and his team are no longer wasting time on purchasing and have enriched their roles as IT technical and maintenance professionals, ensuring the network and its users are fulfilling their potential.

The team is enjoying the purchasing power of procurement professionals in one simple application to save 15% on the organisation's IT budget and nearly a week in man hours.

The Client

The Haberdashers' Aske's Boys' School in Elstree is a selective, independent day school with around 1,100 11-18 year old boys and another 200 from the age of 5 in the Preparatory School. The school has a national reputation for academic excellence and a long and distinguished history. It is also keen to embrace new challenges whilst retaining the best of its traditions and values.

As one of the highest achieving schools in the UK, the organisation prides itself on creating a learning environment in which pupils are happy and can flourish both inside and beyond the classroom. Many boys achieve national prominence in a range of activities from music, sport and drama to bridge, chess and debating. Magnificent grounds and state-of-the-art facilities have recently attracted high praise from schools' inspectors.

The role of IT at the school is given high priority, with a sustained programme of investment in hard and software as well as in staff support and training. The high calibre and forward thinking IT team manage a network employing the very latest technologies and including over 500 PCs, 200 laptops, numerous printers, interactive whiteboards and audio-visual facilities. They also look after the school's telephone and CCTV systems.

More detailed information about the school, its history and plans for development is available on the school website: www.habsboys.org.uk

The Challenge

As part of the IT team's function to service and support its network, they employed an informal system to managing the purchase and delivery of IT products.

Using a simple yet time consuming process of calling or e-mailing three different suppliers to provide quotes on a by-product basis, the team secured price and availability information. This was used for manual comparisons before purchase, which was decided by either availability or price depending on the greater need in any given situation.

However, the team's preferred route, depending on the type of product required, often used a major manufacturer's Direct Independent Schools' Team to service its needs. Price and availability information secured from other suppliers would be used to 'police' any purchase.

This approach limited the team to buying only one brand and a lack of product support or guidance beyond purchase was felt to undermine the relationship. Questions were also asked of the transparency of prices and whether price drift was influencing the level of cost.

But adhering to its tried and tested approach, the team would spend more than one and a half hours every working day calling, e-mailing, sourcing and manually analysing suppliers' price and availability information for products.

This process was exceptionally time consuming and would often deliver product that was not always the best priced or readily available, but was from a trusted source.

With a focused business mentality to managing and maximising the department's budget, the IT team decided it was time for a proactive move towards securing better value. Furthermore, IT Manager Richard Izzard felt there was an opportunity to get the best-priced products faster. After much research the team adopted The IT Index as a best practice approach to IT procurement.

The Solution

Technology services provider, Probrand, has developed The IT Index as a web based procurement solution which features more than 100,000 products from over 1,200 manufacturers in a secure on-line environment.

The solution runs daily price comparisons through its powerful Product Information Management System (PIMS) based on information supplied by the UK's mainline IT distribution network. It then populates this data onto the web-based hub listing the most competitive prices in the industry by best availability.

The IT Index is made available at no cost to organisations with an IT budget of more than £50,000.

The software that drives The IT Index is the first e-procurement solution ever to have been accredited by the Institute of Chartered Accountants of

England & Wales (ICAEW) and this accreditation represents a major endorsement of its credibility.

The solution enables users to secure best possible prices and the quickest possible delivery of any given product from a server to a printer toner cartridge. It enables buyers to get the best-priced product fast.

It eliminates the need for procurement personnel to ring round a number of suppliers for price and stock information, thereby streamlining the business process and improving efficiency.

The solution also saves time wastage and duplication of effort associated with multiple personnel ringing the same supplier for different products as the solution acts as a central user-friendly desktop application.

The IT Index operates on an open book (cost plus agreed margin) basis and takes feeds from 21+ mainline UK distributors for pricing details and compares this information to find the best value. This means users can be confident they are getting the best price in the industry and the best availability on product within the UK distribution network. The IT Index offers a best practice approach to the procurement of IT.

Because The IT Index is a web-based solution, set up and deployment costs are zero and the lead-time associated with deployment is very short. Additionally, as it is a secure solution, fraudulent and unauthorised purchases can be reduced.

As a solution that provides a joined up approach to connecting buyers to myriad suppliers in one application, its best practice best value approach has seen Probrand approved to the Buying Solutions framework for the provision of ICT goods and services.

The Benefits

Habs Boys IT Manager, Richard Izzard, has been at the forefront of revolutionising the way his team conducts IT sourcing and purchasing as a result of adopting The IT Index.

Izzard, explains: "The solution has reduced our procurement time from over a day a week in man hours to just 15 minutes. On average this time equates to nearly a working week saved in every month. This is time we now use to fulfil our core role of managing the school's infrastructure.

“Having tried e-auctions and tenders we soon understood that sustaining best value was only possible with the implementation of a best practice approach. The IT Index provided us with a value for money solution to what appeared to be a significant challenge.

“We are now better serving our user base and I feel we have greater visibility and control over our spending and the network itself. This is to the benefit of the users who can be assured that the system is performing at its best to meet their needs.

“Furthermore, as this department is run like a separate business unit, the bottom line means everything to us. Since its implementation, The IT Index has continued to save us over 15% year-on-year on our six figure IT budget. This means we are in fact stretching the reach of our budget to get far more for the same money – the equivalent of over 50 hi-spec PCs or new machines for 10% of our fixed seats.

“This is particularly valuable when considering the education sector is driven by offering the very latest technology to its pupils. Now we have the opportunity to increase the speed of our update cycle.

“Much of this benefit has been due to the solution’s easy to use, three click capabilities. The team required no training and we were able to buy within 24 hours of registering.

“As in-cost and cost plus margin are displayed on screen, The IT Index has provided us with a transparent solution that gives peace of mind. We now know we are getting best value IT all the time.

“Plus, with 24 hour guaranteed delivery we can be assured that if the product exists within the UK mainline distribution network we will get it as fast as is logistically possible.

“With the re-order pad functionality, we can tailor and populate an area of what is our Private Procurement Hub for IT, with the most commonly ordered items. Again, this saves even more time. We are now looking to tap the potential of the greater management functionality the solution has to offer so we can plan our spending patterns, forecast product requirements and analyse the department’s needs better.

“In addition, the solution is backed by Probrand, which means we have been able to secure the

added value of genuine customer service. If we do need to discuss the right product specification for a particular job we have easy telephone access to a professional, knowledgeable and responsive account team.

”With over 18 years experience in IT, The IT Index is the most efficient purchasing process I have ever experienced. The solution is truly a catalyst to securing best value IT through a best practice approach.”

With the solution’s success, it has now been adopted by other Haberdashers’ Company schools across the country.

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