Big Red Construction continuously improves safety and operations with live data

Big Red Construction standardised its Smartsheet projects with Prodactive's support. With a real-time, bird's-eye view of its portfolio, it can visually manage operations and make fast, informed decisions.

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Stephen Dearing,
Business Systems Manager at
Big Red Construction

BigRed
CONSTRUCTION

Customer:
Big Red Construction

Industry:
Architecture, Construction, and Engineering

Organization Size:
Emerging and SMB
(1-199 employees)

Website:
https://www.wearebigred.com

Region:
EMEA

If there's one thing that helps Big Red Construction stand out from the sea of construction companies, it is its commitment to continuous improvement with the help of technology. Starting out in 2018 as a simple bar fit-out business, Big Red Construction has turned into a leading construction company operating across multiple sectors in the UK. "We use the most cutting-edge technology to ensure that our projects run smoothly and safely," says Stephen Dearing, Business Systems Manager at Big Red Construction.

Towards a single source of truth

True to this spirit, Big Red Construction started its search for project management solutions early on. "The construction sector is known for mountains of paperwork," adds Dearing. "We have over 150 forms for site management. Initially, we were juggling simple spreadsheets and documents. It was hard to collaborate or make sense of our data to make informed decisions."

So, as the company took off, it introduced Smartsheet for managing small-scale projects and schedules. Dearing started perusing the Smartsheet community for ideas on how to implement the solution, and he came across a YouTube video by Rich Coles, Managing Director at Prodactive, which hosts the leading Smartsheet-dedicated YouTube channel outside of Smartsheet. "This is when I found out about template sets in Smartsheets. I realised that there was so much more that I could accomplish. This was my eureka moment."

Inspired by and relying on the template library, Dearing started building a number of solutions, the first of which was the sales pipeline template. "Over the weekend, I consolidated all our sales data, metrics, reports, and dashboards into one, giving out management access to live data and a single source of truth about our sales," he says.

Improving safety at scale

Next up was an observation system to report incidents, problems, and successes from the construction sites. Big Red Construction's safety helmets feature QR codes that anyone can scan with their phone. That opens a form that workers can fill out—anonymously, if they wish—and notify the company about events that might need attention. "Previously, people would fill out pieces of paper and leave it at the site manager's office. It would take us a while to gather such information from multiple sources and assemble weekly, monthly, or quarterly reports," recalls Dearing. "Now, it's more convenient for them to alert us, and we can start investigating right away, react quickly, and improve safety and processes continuously. Before Smartsheet, we had less than 10 observations come in every year. Last year, we received 230 submissions."

Use cases
→ Pipeline Management
→ PMO
→ Project Visibility
→ Standardize Business Operations

Capabilities
→ Control Center
→ Dashboards and Reporting
→ WorkApps

Another solution simplifies requests for information (RFIs) in project management for project leaders to gather information from designers or architects, for example. Instead of sending emails or files back and forth to ask for construction specifications, they can fill out a simple form. Their request is then reviewed and logged into the system, and any open or overdue RFIs are visible, making sure nothing falls through the cracks. "RFIs are easy to overlook, and if a question remains unanswered, that can delay the project for months," Dearing adds.

The RFI process also allows Big Red to establish more trust in its customers. "Clients can also raise RFIs and view status reports," explains Dearing. We make it as easy for them as possible to access information, and this approach has really strengthened our relationship with our customers."

Standardising efficient processes

As the company grew, manually setting up new projects became time-consuming. Without a homogenous project structure, employees struggled to locate information. Big Red Construction started looking for ways to standardise, automate, and future-proof its workflows and templates.

So, Dearing turned to a trusted source of support and information: Prodactive, a Smartsheet professional services-certified partner. "Our goal is to help organisations maximise productive activity. It's all about turning strategy into actions and outcomes," says Rich Coles, Managing Director at Prodactive.

With Prodactive's guidance and technical support, Big Red Construction leveraged Prodactive's world-class project and portfolio management (PPM) solution built in Smartsheet, along with Control Center, to create a blueprint for new projects, and implemented the new solution in under 30 days. "Now within seconds, we can generate about 30 documents like RFIs, project scheduling, and risk analysis," says Dearing. "All we need to do is tweak and customise the project and it's done. Instead of four hours to set up a new project, it now takes us half an hour." With a standardised workflow, managers have a real-time portfolio view of each project, cutting hours of preparations for board meetings and making it easier to make data-informed decisions.

Visual management for continuous improvement

With guidance from Prodactive, Big Red Construction also incorporated Work Apps to make sure that each user has access to projects and features relevant to them. "Each site or project has its own Work App, so it's very easy to give someone access to only one part of our system, minimising confusion and accidents," says Dearing.

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The biggest benefit is more visibility. "For me, being able to work backwards from the dashboards to improve our processes is just fantastic. Smartsheet gives me the tools to visually manage what we're doing. In daily meetings, we can just pull up our dashboards and spot incidents, delays, or anything unusual in our pipeline. We can react very quickly to changes in the business."

More visibility, more informed customers

This added transparency turned out to be the biggest selling point for Big Red Constructions's clients who receive live updates on their projects. When visiting sites, customers are also dazzled by TV screens that display live statistics on things like scheduling and the number of incidents. "Our clients are generally very impressed by our reporting and project management capabilities," notes Dearing. "And we can set up their own spaces within Smartsheet by giving them a link, giving them access to dashboards and other tools. They don't even need to be signed into Smartsheet."

With more transparency comes more productivity. "With this connected execution, there are no more information delays. Big Red Construction can focus on delivering outcomes for its clients. I've witnessed the organisation becoming leaner, faster, and more effective, with more traceability and a great competitive advantage," says Dearing.

Fast-tracked progress

Since the initial implementation, the relationship between Big Red Construction and Prodactive has continued to grow. Dearing regularly seeks their support and guidance, even if just for a second opinion, as he continues on his journey to fully leverage the Smartsheet platform to elevate Big Red Construction to new heights.

Looking back at his company's journey, Dearing is proud of its progress. Big Red Construction gained not only a critical tool to help manage and deliver construction contracts, but also a comprehensive solution used across the organisation for all manner of business operations, from sales pipelines to human resources. "We're a completely different company now. We went from four employees to a core team of 35 and 15 contractors. When we started with Smartsheet, our turnover was about GBP1.5 million. Last year, we reached GBP20 million, and this year, we're forecasting 30." For Dearing, the changes carried out together with Prodactive have played a key role in this growth. "We implemented these automated processes in a very short time, and I absolutely couldn't have gotten there myself. So here's my advice to those who want to bring something exciting to their business, but don't have a lot of time: look outside and you might find the help you need."