

From achilles heel to core asset

Stewart Milne Group and Imajica develop competency-based learning management system which puts employees in the driving seat and boosts company performance

How could a company which had previously struggled to take full advantage of the benefits of structured learning and development, turn it quickly into a key asset, and one integral to company performance? That was the challenge Stewart Milne Group faced in November 2006 and achieved just four months later with the help of their own compelling vision and the market-leading technology of Imajica.

Stewart Milne set themselves a vision – to use L&D to boost performance

Back in 2006 the Stewart Milne Group, headquartered in Aberdeen and one of the UK's leading privately owned builders of residential homes and commercial developments, set themselves a vision – to use learning and development to boost company performance.

“The construction sector has always had a regulatory and contractual need to manage staff skills,” explains HR Director Karen Catto. “But more recently increased competition and a shortage of skilled staff, has forced us to think outside the box for new ways to recruit and retain staff.”

This was a challenge Stewart Milne Group knew was not going to be easy; to that date the Group had not really embraced learning and development.

Karen Catto explains: “Training was hard to manage and difficult to focus on business needs while remaining cost-effective, so it simply didn't happen.”

Stewart Milne design their own vision for learning and development

Recognising a need to think differently, Stewart Milne Group offered 350 employees the opportunity to attend a development programme designed in liaison with the Cranfield School of Management. With the brief to produce an “excellence model” for the culture of the organisation in 2010, this was a major commitment to development and to its team. The company has a 1600 strong workforce spread over six UK locations, and a turnover of approximately £348 million.

Stewart Milne Group designed a model whose foundations lay in employee Learning and Development, and specified the behavioural competencies required to achieve the company's vision for 2010 as part of the blueprint.

Stewart Milne select Imajica to help them deliver their vision

For the first time, Learning and Development had made it onto the corporate agenda, and Stewart Milne began a search for a technology partner to help them deliver a visionary Learning and Development system.

Enter Imajica, also based in Aberdeen, and with whom Stewart Milne already had a long-standing relationship.

Imajica system is perfect fit for Stewart Milne business

Karen Catto says: “Imajica understand our business and the culture we are aiming to achieve, and are able to address both our commercial and technical issues.”

“They understood our vision for an internal learning resource and designed a system that fitted those specific needs and could be rapidly and easily scaled to meet the future challenges of a growing business.”

Benefits meet Stewart Milne expectations

Up and running within a year of its conception, Stewart Milne found the benefits of the Imajica “My Learning Directory” met their original aims.

Karen Catto explains: “Individuals identified their own development needs and sourced training to close the gaps, which was a big step forward for us, and at a lower cost than expected. This was because My Learning Directory allowed us to incorporate and focus on work-based learning such as coaching and mentoring, and the achievement of economies of scale through group training objectives.

“We have also saved money by reducing the cost of ‘no shows’.”

Stewart Milne have also managed to achieve another objective – getting preferred external training providers to specify courses which would deliver development solutions specifically aligned with both technical and behavioural competencies of the group. They also have an audit trail that helps them satisfy Health and Safety requirements, and gain CITB grant funding.

Training is starting to make a real contribution to performance

Importantly, training is now being delivered according to required competencies for roles, resulting in a real contribution to performance.

Arguably though, the biggest success story of the Imajica Learning Directory has been its popularity at grass roots level.

Karen Catto explains: “Staff like the system because it is funky, jargon-free, exciting and easy to use, and gives them control over their own personal development.”

“My Learning Directory” set to be extended to site workers

Going forward, such has been the popularity of the Imajica Learning Directory that Stewart Milne intends to make it available to every member of staff.

Karen Catto concludes: “Currently My Learning Directory is available to around 700 staff, however in just a few months it will be available to all Stewart Milne employees nationwide – whether office or site based.