

QuickBooks Enterprise the best answer in market research



The company:

Don't confuse marketing research services with telemarketing. The former is not a slick, misleading, spin doctor-generated disguise for the latter.

The sheer volume of competing products and services available today dictates suppliers pump millions of dollars into research and development each year in an effort to get ahead. A portion of that time, effort and expense goes into earning customer feedback through surveys, interviews, modelling and statistical analysis.

That's where Ekas Marketing Research Services comes in. The 38-year-old firm, a certified market and social research company, specialises in local, national and international data collection, processing and analysis services. For who? Government and research agencies plus a wide range of national and foreign companies including heavyweights BHP, Citibank Group and Optus.

Most of Ekas's work involves finding out what consumers "think of our client and their products and services" says General Manager Richard Benfield. This is conducted by as many as 450 staff,

only 20 of which are full time, through a variety of telephone and online surveys, and in-person interviews at locations such as shopping malls. Note: it is not telemarketing.

Roughly 50 percent of the company's surveys are conducted via telephone but online versions are increasing in popularity as people can respond on their own time and at their own pace.

As you might expect, reaching consumers and then keeping their attention long enough to participate, isn't easy especially given the unprofessional precedent many telemarketers have set. Incentives are often required to induce participation but even then a one-in-seven response rate is considered an excellent one, Mr Benfield says. This despite 99 per cent of Ekas's surveys and research projects being de-identified. In other words, anonymous where respondents are not required to identify themselves or give contact details.

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Richard Benfield,
Ekas Marketing Research
Services

The challenge:

The sheer volume of market research Ekas conducts each day through its Manly and downtown Sydney offices computes to a vast quantity of records, databases, invoices and other documentation.

Until recently, the company relied on accounting software from MYOB and business software from two other suppliers. The difficulties, amongst others, were the time-consuming and often resource-wasting processes of having to educate and train staff on all three. Ekas account managers struggled to work directly with clients due to multiple databases. In addition, MYOB's Premier product only kept three years of financial data, so rolling into the fourth financial year deleted a year's data.

The solution:

In August 2008, Benfield integrated QuickBooks Enterprise, 10-user version, into Ekas's operations in an effort to streamline its accounting practices, invoicing and record keeping. In so doing, the software has improved workflows and customer service.

“We need managers to work directly with clients,” said Mr Benfield, stressing the importance of having instant access to client records. “QuickBooks Enterprise enables all of our account managers to now use the same database.”

Enterprise is the premium QuickBooks product designed for large businesses with simultaneous access by up to as many as 30 users. The cost-effective software includes comprehensive reporting features, industry specific editions, multi-company reporting as well as being multi-site enabled to manage business growth. Third-party products can integrate seamlessly with Enterprise.

Mr Benfield confirmed remote access to the software and vital company records has facilitated smoother operations between Ekas's two offices. The software's ease of use has enabled staff to quickly adopt the technology into their daily tasks, particularly as the company now has a single accurate client database rather than three incomplete ones.

“We can now assign contacts to clients and projects to contacts,” says Mr Benfield, noting the feature was not available in MYOB Premier. “[To some,] this may seem minor but it has made a huge difference in our ability to measure individual contacts spend and overall client spend.”

Accordingly, Ekas no longer requires a CRM package as QuickBooks Enterprise allows staff to append all quotations and projects directly to the contact. This, Mr Benfield adds, is the nature of the company's business as 99 per cent of its contact with new clients involves quoting and tenders.

Ekas has successfully integrated its accounting software to track all jobs and projects. Previously only having three years of data available at any one time meant the company needed a separate program to register all of its projects – some of which have spanned more than 10 years. This entailed creating jobs in two systems and then transferring data. The addition of QuickBooks Enterprise has eliminated that time-consuming process and in so doing has saved Ekas staff in excess of 20 hours work per week, Mr Benfield says.