THE OLDHAM CHRONICLE

CASE STUDY

When the Oldham Chronicle was looking to make a quantum leap and reinvent their business in order to remain sustainable, they enhanced their 30-year partnership with PCS to develop a new publishing model.

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The Oldham Chronicle has been serving the local community independently with news and views since 1864. With a circulation of 7968, it is currently published five nights a week. Managing Director David Whaley has been with the paper since 2000 and in recent years understood the need to completely change the way it worked in order to remain profitable in a difficult market.

"Like most other publishers in the regional industry, the Oldham Chronicle is facing many challenges," comments David. "Building on our relationship with PCS, we realised the magnitude of what we could achieve together in order to make the level of change and cost savings that we ourselves, and the whole industry, need to make."

FACILITATING THOSE CHANGES

PCS was able to work with Oldham to understand the shape of their business and where they needed to be. This led to Oldham taking on the entire portfolio of PCS hosted publishing solutions, most significantly its content management solution Knowledge. The other major change was the outsourcing of subbing and advert production to third party PCS customers Newsquest and MNA.

David continues, "Our newsroom operation is unrecognisable to where it was just a few years ago. We have had to lose valuable members of the team, which is never easy, but we are now producing the paper with just fifteen staff - something that would have been impossible with our previous production workflow. Our costs were too high and our methods too manual, if we hadn't made these changes everything would have gone."

As part of the overhaul, Oldham received upgrades for its existing PCS advertising and production solutions ABS and Pulse, as well as new installations of NCS for circulation and the editorial content hub Knowledge. This provides Oldham with a full SaaS environment for its entire publishing operation, meaning they are not responsible for maintaining any IT infrastructure internally.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HUBBING

The outsourcing of two key elements of Oldham's workflow, copy editing and ad production, has meant that newsroom staff can concentrate on gathering content while those activities seamlessly take place elsewhere. "Hubbing and collaboration is something all independent newspapers need to be looking at in order to reduce overheads. By utilising the existing teams at Newsquest and MNA, who are already using PCS technology, they become an extension to our team who can handle the work efficiently," comments David.

Content editors send story packages to the Newsquest subbing pool from within Knowledge where they can be edited accordingly by the subbing team, who can see the page layouts via edition view. Once stories have been edited by Newsquest, they are checked in as complete or returned to the content editor if there is a query. Content editors can then apply these stories to pages, which they have the responsibility for checking and authorising.

With ad production, booking information and instructions are fed into the MNA's advertising production workflow, the artwork is created and then automatically passed back to Oldham for approval before feeding into Knowledge ready for output. David continues, "The entire workflow is fluid, no matter where material is being worked on. If I watch the system it just flows, yet we are removing significant overheads at the same time as delivering revenue for MNA and Newsquest."

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ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Oldham is now changing how they put their pages together due to the flexible nature of Knowledge. Working together to match the needs at Oldham, PCS built the system so they can utilise page templates but are not restricted by them. They can also be edited via a web-browser with no design software required.

"We have had to learn to work differently with templates, but having the ability to drag copy and imagery onto the pages in an instant allows us to put pages together quickly with no manual drawing," says David. "Longer term, this will allow us to create more uniformity within the paper whilst introducing creative flair that will improve the end product. We have danced with the old and the new during our transition, but we have always got the paper out in time."

REMOVING BARRIERS

Knowledge provides Oldham with the opportunity to remove geographical constraints, as staff can access the paper wherever they are with only a browser. Content can easily be utilised for print or digitally with no need for re-purposing. Oldham are currently producing print versions of the paper, delivering content to their website via a single content hub and will be looking into which other digital channels to utilise.

"I now have a real-time view of the paper that gives me control over reacting to change. Previously we have been unable to do that, let alone benefit from it. As we embrace our new way of working, we will be able to focus on content without getting caught up in a host of unnecessary processes. We are hoping this will also allow us to introduce some new products as well as monetising what we have."

REAPING REWARDS

In conclusion David comments, "In the past we have found economies of scale difficult to achieve, yet we now find ourselves doing exactly that. Knowledge has delivered the efficiencies we needed to remove process costs and has the scope to be adaptable to our needs in the future. We have gone from a standalone operation to one that is fully hosted and operates within a virtual group scenario that we are in control of. We are all aware that we have to increase digital revenues and I believe Knowledge will help us to do that. When making such a change, you have to have faith in the people you are partnering with which is why we knew it would work with PCS."

Want to know more?

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