UNISA SLICES A MONTH FROM ITS BUDGETING BURDEN WITH IDU-CONCEPT

The University of South Africa (Unisa), the biggest distance-learning institution in the southern hemisphere and one of the 10 mega universities in the world, has reduced its budgeting cycle by a month with financial budgeting and reporting software idu-Concept.

The university's merger in 2004 with Technikon South Africa and Vista University Distance Education Campus swelled Unisa's student body to more than 253 000 students, 3 800 staff members, assets worth in excess of R3 billion and an annual budget of around R3,2 billion

The administrative complexities involved in budgeting for such an institutional megalith are multifaceted. Annual student intakes around the world, the human resources management of national and international lecturers and tutors, and the amalgamated workflow systems of the three established campuses into a single workable process presented an enormous challenge.

Willem du Plessis, director of budget and management accounting at Unisa, said the merger increased staff numbers by an extra 1 000 people and burgeoned the annual budget by an estimated R600 million.

 "Trying to manage a budget of this size using an Excel spreadsheet system rapidly became an administrative nightmare. Data had to be collated, input to Excel and sent to each department. Changes would often have to be applied manually, making the process painstakingly slow and inefficient. We were drowning in paperwork and always fighting deadlines that were impossible to meet using a spreadsheet system," said Du Plessis.

idu Software MD Kevin Phillips says spreadsheet based budgeting has been replaced by feature rich, dedicated budgeting and reporting applications.

"idu-Concept is one of the most extensively used budgeting applications in South Africa. This meant we were able to present Unisa with a tried and tested solution," says Phillips.

"du Plessis says idu-Concept has shifted Unisa's budgeting and reporting workflow to another dimension. The solution's powerful capability to categorise the budget into various portfolios, departments and colleges provided greater access to information, improving financial agility in an accessible, user-friendly style."

"The reporting functionality of idu-Concept has been particularly useful, enabling managers to be responsible for their own budgets rather than have to rely on monthly data from the budgeting department. "idu-Concept has easily reduced our budgeting cycle by four weeks – we've gained a month of efficiency," said du Plessis.

 "idu-Concept provides managers with the tool to discharge their financial responsibilities. With cost centre managers managing their financial responsibilities, accountants can concentrate on analysing the numbers," says Phillips.

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Plans for the future involve further tapping into the capabilities of the software by calculating each employee's remuneration according to specific department as a cost centre, thereby linking staff members into individual departments in the budget.

"The university's HR processes and procedures have taken time to be formalised, which has added a challenge to budgeting. For the 2006, 2007 and 2008 budgets we worked on cost-to-company per post level for each employee."

Du Plessis said through idu-Concept, the 2008 budget will be the most accurate budget the university has achieved to date. Once all staff placements have been finalised by Unisa's HR department, every employee will be linked to a department and budgeted for accordingly.

"idu-Concept is an extremely powerful budgeting and reporting tool, and the best software investment the university could have made. As yet we have not been in a position to utilise the solution to its full capacity, and are looking forward to maximising its capabilities in the near future," said du Plessis. In order to achieve optimal use of the system, we are in constant contact with idu Software.

Phillips says there some exciting developments in the pipeline with Unisa and idu Software looks forward to meeting those challenges.

About idu Software

idu Software makes budgeting, forecasting, performance management and reporting tools to simplify financial management. Our flagship product, idu-Concept, provides easy, effective budgeting and financial reporting for medium-sized to large businesses. idu-Concept integrates easily with ERP software, but unlike more cumbersome offerings, idu-Concept can be implemented quickly, requires little or no ongoing consulting fees and reduces budgeting cycles from months to weeks. Our company is owner-managed, and still led by its two founding members.

About Unisa

Unisa is Africa's leading distance learning institution nurturing inspiring leaders of tomorrow. We are a reputable, comprehensive, flexible and accessible open distance learning institution that is motivating a future generation. We offer internationally accredited qualifications and have world-class resources.

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