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IT made easy

Over the years Crane and Access hire "start ups" have grown from the smallest of beginnings to become significant regional or even national players in the industry. As such companies reach a certain size; pressure to get the right systems in place grows. This is particularly true of the IT side of the business, as an operation moves from manual invoicing, accounts and record-keeping to installing computerised systems. We look at how one company, Kimberly Access of Stoke, made the transition and helped develop a system tailored to powered access rental companies.

Established 10 years ago, Kimberly Access now has 30 staff, depots in Stoke, Doncaster and St Helens and a fleet of 600 boom and scissor lifts. Until late 2002 the company was still manually producing hire invoices and statements. At that time there were six employees, the business was growing and resources were being stretched. An IT solution was urgently required.

Company Accountant and Secretary Ian Mayland, had just joined the company at the time: He explains what happened next.

"We made contact with a systems company called Asp hire which already knew the powered access industry and was looking to develop a bespoke IT system that would be very simple to use. We agreed to act as guinea pigs and the system was developed around our operations. Since the system went live at our premises we've given it intensive, in depth field trials, have rolled it out to other depots and have worked with Asp hire to further enhance the software package."

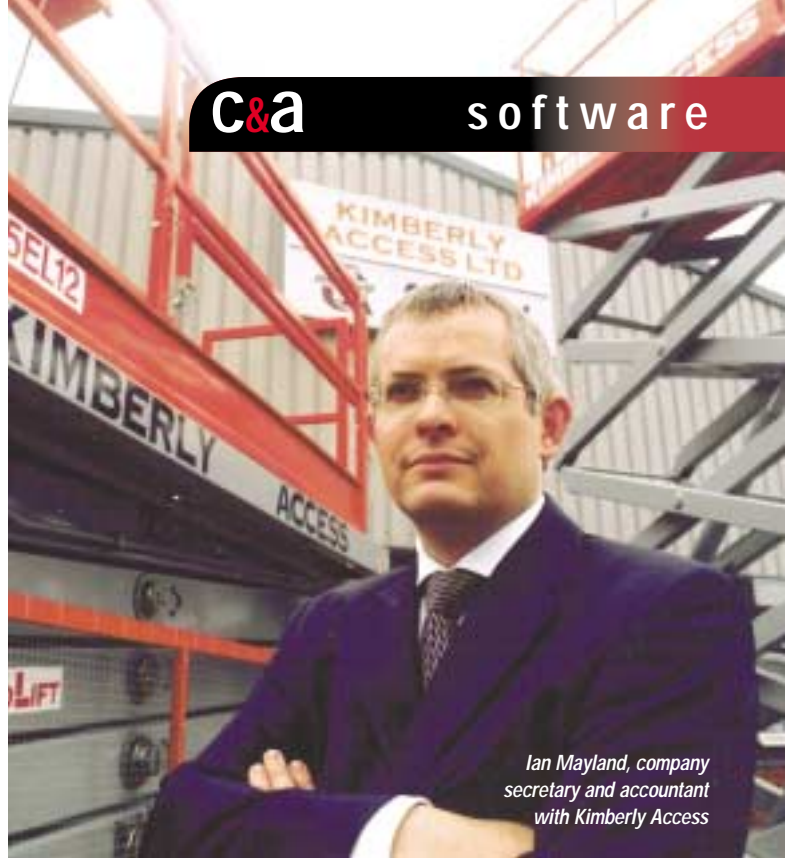
The technical director at Asp hire is Richard Fogg he confirmed that the system has been fine tuned now and



The Asp hire system is web based and tailored to Access rental completed extensive in-field testing and evaluation with Kimberly. The company now plan to launch it across the plant hire industry.

Mayland said that before opting to be guinea pigs for Asp hire, Kimberly Access had considered a number of other systems: "However, all were complex and offered far more facilities than you would ever need or use, yet you would be paying for those functions. The system that Asp hire proposed has to be the simplest and easiest to use on the market and is a low cost solution for companies with limited IT resources."

Kimberly Access began to use Asp hire at its Stoke head office and depot before bringing other depots on line as they opened for business. "We are currently three years into a five year



Ian Mayland, company secretary and accountant with Kimberly Access

programme of expansion and envisage a further two depots in the next two years and to expand our fleet to 1,000 machines. A typical IT system to support this growth would have cost considerably more than we paid Asp hire" said Mayland.

"The beauty of Asp hire is that it's web-based so there's no complicated software installation to carry out – as a new depot opens, our staff just go onto the internet and in a few clicks they are up and running with the system. Asp hire back up all the data so you don't need to go to the expense of having your own server and you have the reassurance of knowing that your data has been backed up off site in the event of a fire or break in."

As well as handling invoicing, the system will set up and manage customer accounts and hire contracts, and will keep track of a company's hire fleet.

"Every time we expand our fleet we add each machine to the system and give it a fleet number. When a contract is raised the system prints off the machine's inspection certificate and we send this off to the customer to show him that the inspection has been carried out. We inspect our machines every time they come back off hire. The machines are serviced in accordance with the manufacturers'

recommendations and this information is also entered onto the system so that we get automatic reminders about when the next service is due."

The system shows full customer details and also produces delivery and collection notes for Kimberly-Access's in-house and contracted drivers. It identifies rehire machines and shows fleet utilisation both company-wide and from depot to depot.

"We have different levels of access for different staff, for example our engineers only need to look at the fleet listings and the contracts. There's a 'read only' level to prevent any changes being made to data, and there's a higher level that authorises changes being made to hire rates on a contract."

Looking ahead, Mayland is working with Asp hire to find ways to further develop the system: "When the cost of 3G mobile phone technology comes down we are looking at linking mobiles into the system so that our sales reps can call up and look at the customer's details when on site."

"The powered access rental industry is very competitive and you need to sell added value. We are also looking at the possibility of giving our customers limited access to the system so that they can check on the status of their own hires," he said.