

Global Forward and Microsoft BPOS

a match made in heaven

Global Forward helps companies that wish to set up operations in Europe with their financial processes and reporting systems. Global Forward recently set up a cloud collaborative team environment for a Spanish multinational based on SharePoint Online. The new environment has made having an accountant superfluous and Global Forward future compliant.



Fred Stroeken, owner and managing director of Global Forward.

by Peter Wagenaar

Peter Wagenaar is a freelance writer specialised in Microsoft technology. Before becoming a freelancer, he was editor in chief of Microsoft.nl. This case study was prepared in cooperation with Microsoft, Global Forward and Macaw.

Solution with low acceptance threshold

Global Forward helps companies that wish to set up operations in Europe with their financial processes and reporting systems. The company from Waalre (NL) started providing compliance services for international companies in 1999 – long before the Sarbanes-Oxley Act and the Tabaksblat Code – and has grown into an organisation with a workforce of over 20 people and an extensive network of partners throughout Europe.

Being in business starts with communication

“We believe that being in business starts with communication”, says Fred Stroeken, owner and managing director of Global Forward. “This is also how we go about our work; we are not bookkeepers, but process consultants. We work in a triangle with our clients and a Big4 accountancy partner, in this case PWC, in which we do the things that the accountant does not want to or may not do, such as the production of statutory accounts for international companies.”

“Without SharePoint Online, we would never have been able to take on this assignment.”

In 2010, Global Forward was requested by a Spanish multinational in the construction and system installation sector to organise the bookkeeping, reporting and payroll accounting for a project involving approximately 250 workers with a completion time of 18 months and a contract value of 30 million euros.

The cloud work floor

Stroeken could easily imagine this assignment becoming “a huge cabinet cluttered with files and pieces of paper” - exactly what Global Forward did not want. He knew that Microsoft partner Macaw has extensive knowledge of compliance processes

‘in the cloud’ and contacted them. Could we put the work floor digitally on line for the Spanish multinational?

Macaw knew the ideal solution: Microsoft SharePoint Online, part of the Microsoft Business Productivity Online Suite (BPOS), which is currently known as Microsoft 365.

“SharePoint is usually thought of as a document management system”, says Stroeken. “But we like to think out of the box and immediately saw, for example, how the advanced workflows and the possibility of providing our clients and partners worldwide access to the same work environment matched our project.”

Global Forward did not need to search any further for alternatives. “We and the Spanish multinational both regard Microsoft as a reliable partner for cloud solutions. Our client’s core activity, quality management and continuity are assured with Microsoft.”

Use of processes that are already in place

The SharePoint solution that Macaw proposed gave Global Forward the opportunity to say to its client: tell us what you have and we’ll build a solution around that. “We looked for ways of connecting to our client’s existing workflows”, says Stroeken. “Because the client did not have to implement any major changes, our solution has a low acceptance threshold. We make optimal use of processes that are already in place.”

Building the collaborative team environment in SharePoint Online took three weeks from concept to completion. The workflows were in an Excel workbook that Macaw loaded in SharePoint. Invoices, salaries, authorisations of people in Spain – everything goes through one system. “Linking up to the financial administration was a piece of cake”, says Stroeken. “And we made having an accountant superfluous!”

Audit-proof

The financial flows have now been digitized, detailed documentation is available for the 250 workers, the system operates with different languages and the uniformity of data is assured. “Everybody knows what is expected of them. The transparency has made us audit-proof and enables an auditor to start working on the financial reports straightaway.”

“Without SharePoint Online, we would never have been able to take on this assignment”, says Stroeken.” The technology is opening the door to new opportunities for Global Forward. “We can now not only handle larger projects, but also penetrate new markets.

The organisation

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Requirements

- Fast set-up
- Online environment for international collaboration
- Multi-language support

Advantages

- Simple to use
- Makes having an accountant superfluous
- Offers new opportunities

Products

- Microsoft Business Productivity Online Suite
- Microsoft SharePoint Online

MORE INFORMATION

www.globalforward.nl or call 0031 (0)40 213 77 35