

Charities can focus on what matters thanks to seamless integration and sophisticated financial reporting

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POSTMODERN ERP

CASE STUDY

The Thalidomide Trust Integrates Aqilla with Salesforce to Create a Unique Beneficiary Payments System

Having previously relied on a totally bespoke payment system, The Thalidomide Trust chose Aqilla when they discovered the Cloud-based accounting solution could be tailored to meet the Trust's unique needs when integrated with Salesforce.

Finance Director Jenny Tunbridge's job was to oversee the implementation and ensure the system would meet the needs of the accounting team whilst also servicing the needs of the charity's 467 beneficiaries; who are able to directly access personal funds administered by the Trust via a web portal.

“Aqilla worked with us to design the process and also with our Salesforce agent to create the integrated system”

Jenny says, *“Using our old bespoke system, we were exposed to ‘key man’ risk, and it wasn’t a sustainable solution. Other software packages we looked at would have been too expensive to tailor and implement. Aqilla comes with all the benefits of the Cloud. It also gives us the unique functionality we need at a price we can afford.”*

A demanding implementation

The Trust is primarily responsible for administering beneficiary payments - a complex process which is possibly unique to the organisation.

The Trust receives compensatory funds from Diageo (formerly Distillers Company Ltd, the original distributor of the Thalidomide drug in the UK), as well as grants from all four of the UK's Health Departments – a funding agreement which is in place until 2022.

For reporting purposes, income from both sources must be held separately and comply with accounting regulations for Charities. Each beneficiary has his or her own dedicated account into which The Thalidomide Trust places funds. The allocated amount varies by individual; it is calculated based on a scoring system which gauges the severity of the individual's disability. Each score is weighted against the overall funds available (the yearly distribution) and apportioned accordingly. Once funds have been allocated, beneficiaries either access their personal accounts via the Trust's website portal or, for beneficiaries whose level of disability is more severe, the Trust is able to process funds on their behalf.

Aqilla has been implemented to meet the Trust's payment needs by cleverly utilising the way in which the system handles Accounts Payable; in Aqilla, beneficiary accounts have been set up as creditors and each beneficiary has their own record. Some have multiple bank accounts into which funds are paid. Aqilla offers the user the option of selecting their preferred account. Detailed modifications have also been made to the system's document reference terms and tabs in order to improve the overall user experience.

Aqilla has also created a tailored user interface using its preferred query builder Sharperlight. This allows the beneficiaries to access and view their accounts, in bank statement format, from a web-hosted portal.

Integrating with Salesforce

The systematic scoring process which determines how funds are allocated is calculated in Salesforce, the Trust's CRM system which captures each beneficiary's unique profile. The integration of Aqilla and Salesforce works to ensure the scores are extracted accurately and put into an accounting journal. This allows Aqilla to apportion funds in an automated process.

Jenny says, *"The system works almost like a personal bank account for our beneficiaries so Aqilla needed a greater level of tailoring than you might expect from a Cloud-based accounting system geared towards organisations of our size. Aqilla worked with us to design the process and also with our Salesforce agent to create the integrated system which now meets everyone's needs."*

Helping reduce costs and increase efficiency

Finding a Cloud-based accounting system which is also highly-configurable is an attractive solution for a cost-conscious organisation like The Thalidomide Trust. For a relatively low monthly subscription, upgrades are free and hardware costs disappear. The Cloud also allows for easy integration with other business apps, enabling smaller enterprises to benefit from improved processes. Cloud-based accounting apps come at a relatively low cost of entry for organisations like the Trust, allowing the charity to enjoy some early returns on investment.

Aqilla's Managing Director Hugh

Scantlebury says, *"It's great to see an organisation like The Thalidomide Trust obtain real savings by being clever with Cloud-based business apps. This enables them to focus on serving the core interests of their beneficiaries. The days of costly implementations and bespoke system design are hopefully drawing to a close for organisations with complex accounting needs."*

"Reporting in Aqilla is one area in particular which saves time and improves information",
says Finance Director Jenny Tunbridge.

Using integrated Sharperlight query builder, the Trust is able to produce reports in different formats for different stakeholders at the touch of a button.

Instead of staff having to download, manipulate and reconcile information in Excel, they can spend their valuable time more productively.

Examples of the types of reports which have been produced for the Trust include reports for budget holders by account code, comparing actual against budget and forecast; high level reports for Trustees analysed by programmes rather than by account codes; statutory accounts for the Charity Commission and Companies House analysed by fund classification i.e. Income Restricted, Designated Unrestricted and General Unrestricted; and specific reports for donors.

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The Thalidomide Trust also makes use of Aqilla’s automated approval process and workflow groups to ensure internal processes are as efficient as possible for staff and Trustees.

Summing up

Now that the system is fully implemented and the crucial processes run efficiently, Financial Director Jenny Tunbridge talks about further developing the reporting aspect in Aqilla to produce a wider range of management information. *“Aqilla makes reporting really easy because the information is always up to date and easy to view. The dashboards which have been created for us are really useful. We want to set up more reports which can be shared in a dashboard format so that we all have instant access to the information we might want to see at any point in time.”*