

# Urbis

improving access to performance information with Sonar6



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Urbis is an Australian organisation providing integrated property consulting services. Established in 1965, Urbis now has offices in every Australian state, in the Middle East and also works with clients in Asia.

Having experienced significant and rapid growth with a current workforce of 340, Urbis' paper-based talent management system was no longer cutting it. They needed something that would engage their GenY staff and not scare off the rest!

Urbis didn't want a complete overhaul of its existing paper-based system. They just wanted something that would enable better storage, easier access and effective use of information collected.

A simple, online talent management system that gets staff buy-in... mission impossible?

## Environmental Factors

Gail Byrne – Director of HR – was involved in developing and implementing Urbis' previous talent management system. But even after a review and upgrade in 2006 when a newly developed set of competencies and forms available on the intranet were added, the system was still very manual.

The HR team was constantly looking through paper piles for specific forms, making it difficult and time consuming to access and process the right information. Often forms never made it to HR, which meant there were gaps in information.

On top of that, the company's rapid growth meant more

people, more time and more paper! The writing was on the wall – an online system was in order.

"As a smaller company it was relatively easy to keep track of a paper-based system. But with substantial growth, we needed to develop a new system and look at ways to store information, access it, and then use it," says Gail.

Key to successful people management is inspiring and motivating staff. As a predominantly young, computer literate and tech savvy workforce, the paper-based review system was not delivering. Urbis needed something engaging that would appeal to a very switched on workforce – it needed to be cool.

A good talent management system has to work for managers too – and managers are busy. It needs to be simple, useful and ultimately help drive the business forward.

So, how do you do 'cool' and win the respect of management?

## Requirements

Urbis needed an online talent management system that was easy and effective. And they wanted to steer away from the traditional 'performance review' mentality – it was time to step it up...

"It was about having an online system for us – that was the initial need – that reflected our current system and enabled access and use of information."

Urbis' talent management system needs looked like this:

1. Good reporting.
2. It's got to be simple.
3. Encourage management ownership.

"There are two ways you can approach a new system: go with the familiar or, if you really want to shake it up, get a totally new system which we didn't want or need to do – we wanted to move our old system online."

More than simply choosing a talent management system that worked, it was crucial that staff liked using it... not to mention management!

"We wanted a system that would help staff own their own reviews and, ultimately, to own and be responsible for their own careers."

Looking into various systems, Urbis knew there were plenty of possibilities offering something that was online, simple and effective. But Sonar6 had a distinct advantage – an existing relationship with business transformation experts Bendelta who already assist Urbis' with their people management needs.

It was important to Urbis to implement something familiar, something friendly – or staff would never go for it.

Urbis learned about Sonar6 through Bendelta and asked them to tailor their toolkit to better suit their professional services' needs. So Sonar6 got busy...

## Sonar6 Solution

In 2008, Gail spent time with a Sonar6 consultant to design a system that said: 'Urbis'. Urbis competencies, assessments, language = Urbis results. Sonar6 also worked with Bendelta to develop a tailored, professional services focus to the talent management system.

"Sonar6 actually used our text to create the system. It looks very similar to what we were using as a paper system."

After initial plans to stagger implementation, Gail thought "Why not get it out there?!" and the system was implemented across the entire company.

"It was really important to us that we owned the system. So we've given it our own name – ERP, the Employee Review Programme – and our own HR team did all internal training."

Within two months, training across Australia was complete and the first round of reviews had been carried out – phase one of the mission, successfully completed.

The performance review process was spot on – staff recognised it, understood the changes and improvements and loved it. As a result, compliance reached 90% and quality of data collection was also much improved.

The next phase will be ensuring that the quality of the reporting – turning data into useful information – is as well designed as the process.

## Summary

An online talent management system... life just got easier.

A total overhaul of Urbis' paper-based system wasn't even needed. In fact, using the 'old' to create the 'new' means the good stuff only gets better.

For Urbis, keeping track of - and having easy access to - information mean it's easier to meet the needs of a growing company. Sonar6 helps identify the gaps and develop the necessary skills to take the business forward.

Urbis has big plans to build their performance / talent management capability and will be working with Sonar6 to constantly evaluate and improve the toolkit.

"For what we needed, the current model is a great first step. As we work with Sonar6 to fine tune the reporting function, effective use of the system will only increase."

Next stop, management.

"How we educate directors and management about using it as a talent management tool (and not just an information storage facility), is a matter of education – and that's what we're working on next," Gail says.

Sonar6 co-founder Mike Carden gets the last word...

"From our perspective, the Urbis experience is one that will resonate with a lot of businesses. You don't have to re-create the wheel with Sonar6. Many businesses have perfectly adequate performance reviews and some talent management tools that are paper-based. Sonar6 can adapt and potentially simplify the existing practices and make them much easier and cooler to use. We give the manual processes a technological makeover and ensure that the new ways are evolutionary rather than revolutionary and therefore, don't scare off the users!"

## Results

It's early days yet, but response to Sonar6 (or should we say ERP!) has been positive...

### On tailoring to fit:

"Sonar6 worked closely with us to adopt a professional services focus to the talent management system. We showed them what we did, our list of competencies, and they developed the system along our lines."

"Our people have really embraced the system because it is familiar and uses the same language as our previous system. This is particularly good, given that it's hosted by a third party."

### On staff owning their reviews:

"It was really important for staff to own their own reviews. Staff has access to their reviews online and can track their own progress which is really empowering."

"There was no 'fear of the unknown', because staff were still being assessed in the same way. And using the same competencies meant it was familiar – so even though it was a new system, it was not foreign."

### On one stop shop:

"Prior to Sonar6, we had information all over the place and access was not necessarily straight forward which was a nightmare. Now all information is in one place, on one system."

"Staff like how our competencies are reflected in the review process. They used to have to go back and forward between the competencies and reviews that were in paper form."

### On being a useful business tool:

"For an HR practitioner, it's really useful to have a tool to take out to business units and talk them through the trends in their teams."

"We're already using the system to analyse and identify training and development needs in our teams. Now we need to look at how it currently stands, and work out how we best use the information and take it back out to the business."

### On fresh perspective:

"The visuals are good, with the people slotting in after the review is completed. And the end stuff, doing kites and seeing the team dumped into graphics – it produces an interesting perspective, and takes it to another level."

"We are dealing with a predominantly GenY staff, who are computer literate. So for them, the imagery makes it more interesting and being online gets them more motivated and engaged."

### On keeping it simple:

"Most of our managers are technicians of some sort, and they need to be able to get their head around it – Sonar6 is really easy to use."

### On no more missing forms!

"Staff have embraced having an online system. Over the years, I don't know how many phone calls I got about lost reviews... Online access means forms can't go missing!"