

CASE STUDY MOBILE DEVELOPERS

Partners in grime

A building maintenance contractor tells **Brad Howarth** how beta testing helped it leapfrog competitors.

MOST companies that buy packaged software usually forgo customisation. But by working with local software maker Pronto Software, the Sydney building engineering and maintenance company Hirotec got a system to suit without hiring its own developers.

Hirotec director Paul Sicari says his company started to evaluate software systems in early 2005.

"We needed and wanted to grow the business and the software system that (we) were using wouldn't really help us achieve that," Mr Sicari says.

At the time, Hirotec had 40 workers and was looking for a software package that had all the features it needed. It focused on the PRONTO-Xi software due to the developer's experience in Hirotec's industry. The engineering company especially needed to support its mobile workers but Pronto lacked that ability.

"We didn't want to go down the path of having to train our in-house people to manage and maintain the software," Mr Sicari says. "(Pronto) didn't have the mobility software so we were talking to them about what they were going to deliver.

"They had a rough-and-ready beta version that they were demonstrating to us but our main concern was whether they (were) committed to it and if they would deliver what we wanted."



Hirotec says working with a local software maker has made it more efficient.

Hirotec was the first to test Pronto's mobility software and was able to influence its development.

"That was a critical aspect for us, because it gave us the opportunity to work with Pronto and really build in a lot of the functionality that we wanted, without exorbitant cost," he says. "It's something that we wouldn't have had the bank balance or the capabilities to do ourselves."

Pronto senior marketing manager Paul Goepfert says the two companies made a good team.

"Enabling mobility has been a strong focus from a product-development perspective and Hirotec was keen to improve service efficiencies through

mobile management," Mr Goepfert says. "Getting feedback from the field at all stages of our product development process has allowed us to deliver a tried and tested industry-standard application that has gained strong traction in the market."

Mr Sicari says the benefits to Hirotec are the ability to hire 100 new workers but a smaller number of administrative staff than would otherwise have been needed. Field workers enter data into their personal digital assistants, which flows into Hirotec's job and service cost system, eliminating data re-entry.

"They sound like small things but when you have tens of thousands of service calls

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PAUL SICARI

over a period of a year, it all adds up," he says.

Hirotec has reduced its invoice time by 20% and Mr Sicari says it provides more effective data analysis to clients. This has been essential to win about \$5 million in business with larger commercial clients.

"We've used it as a real point of differentiation in marketing the business and used it to win a lot of significant contracts," Mr Sicari says. "The mobility component of Pronto is something we have taken to the table with clients and discussed with them as a specific issue.

"If we weren't able to provide that field-based electronics information capture, we would have just been another also-ran because a lot of competitors in our industry also use Pronto. So it's a very real and tangible result that we're getting from a new contract point of view."

Mr Goepfert says: "The word of mouth we've been able to generate from this enhanced mobility capability has helped us grow market share in the facilities management and service industries."