Headquartered in Perth, Present Group specialises in four key areas of expertise covered by its four business units: Powertech Services, Precise Facilities, Octave Consulting and Seamless Resourcing. The group’s stated aim is to become a vital, trusted partner for its clients in major energy, resource and infrastructure projects. As well as WA, its national network comprises offices and branches into Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales.

Present Group underwent unprecedented growth as a result of the primary resource sector expansion in Australia. It needed an ERP system that would not only meet its current transactional volumes, but also could provide the flexibility to serve the business’s future needs and adapt to the continually changing business environment.

Present Group’s key ERP requirements were:

- To be able to work seamlessly as part of a business process eco-system.
- To have a partnership based on trust, accessibility and understanding.
- To adopt a licensing model that supported rapid business growth.
- To offer functionality that catered for growth complexity, not just volumes.

The Present Group’s CEO, Brian Grimmer, stated from the outset that an ERP implementation would be “open heart surgery for the business”. It was imperative that the whole of the management team was committed and actively involved in the choice and deployment of the right solution components.

“There were other solutions that met our immediate needs and which offered a proven path to implementation but we saw that we would run out of road in five years,” says Peter Midgley, CXO. “Our business was undergoing a complete metamorphosis: five-fold expansion in transactional volumes, moving from one to eight regional offices, overseas expansion, business unit segmentation, offshore administrative processing and the inevitable influx of new people who couldn’t be expected to know the fundamentals of our business operations or our social environment.”

People-focused solution

“We had to have a solution that placed people at the centre and offered flexible processes as part of an overall solution,” adds Midgley. “Not just bureaucratic, islanded processes set up to serve the needs of the finance function.”

Epicor’s service-oriented architecture (SOA) played an important part in Present Group choosing the Epicor technology over competitor offerings. Epicor ERP is built on next-generation technology allowing its customers to adapt the technology to future-proof against as yet unknown requirements.

“SOA enabled us to build a business process eco-system of Epicor ERP, CRM, HCM, SharePoint, Analytics, NewsGator and Nintex across a fully cloud computing-based infrastructure,” says Midgley.

“The ability of Epicor ERP to readily deploy as web-parts means that all we have to have to open a new office is a browser. Any one of our technicians in the field, armed only with an iPad, can have equal access to our corporate systems as would any of our head office-based staff.”

Present Group looked at all the players in the market and did an extensive analysis of the available solutions. The company was fortunate to have a wealth of ERP implementation experience in its management team.

“To some extent this made us some vendors’ worst nightmare – an informed buyer!” recalls Midgley. “Almost by a process of attrition, the shortfalls of competitor products to cater for our future needs became evident. Epicor kept coming back, kept getting better and continued to take an interest in our needs.”

A crucial aspect was the willingness of Present Group’s senior management to engage in the process and try and make the ERP and the overall process eco-system work in harmony. For Midgley, the nature of Epicor’s senior management had a lot to do with the decision.

“They listened to our requirements and they understood our business aspirations,” he explains. “They explained to us their own business aspirations and we found a unity of purpose between their objectives and ours. They were interested in understanding our business and working with us to address our need – their success was equated with our success.”

Present Group knew they would benefit from establishing a partnership with an ERP vendor that was also looking to establish a long-term business relationship and who shared their ambitions for success and growth. Accessibility to Epicor’s key executives, globally and regionally, was a benefit for Present Group’s management during the implementation process. They met with Epicor President and CEO Pervez Qureshi when he visited Australia for the regional customer conference, discussing a strategy to make Epicor capability central to Present Group’s business offerings.
“Epicor is a midmarket player which gave us accessibility to the top people. There is no way we would have had this type of access with some of the other software companies we were talking to,” says Midgley. “We have a far greater business relationship with Epicor than simply using the software. Implementing Epicor was an investment with cost savings, but more that this it has become an important partner in establishing a competitive advantage and our relationship with Epicor is part of that competitive strategy.”

Rolling out the system
Present Group is rolling out the Epicor ERP system over a number of phases. The first phase of the implementation was focussed on achieving accurate and timely invoicing. According to Midgley, “that was the payback”. Next came HCM, CRM, Field Services and Asset Management. The tipping point after this will be an almost 100% deployment using multi-platform web-parts. Once Present Group is satisfied with this internally, functionality will be extended to its clients.

The relationship Present Group and Epicor represents an entirely new business for the two companies, and Midgley is complimentary of Epicor’s willingness to embrace the opportunities it presents, rather than perceiving it as a threat. “We have a constant appetite for more with Epicor, but because they have taken the time to understand our needs they make sure that we don’t become our own worst enemy, implementing components early on which shouldn’t be implemented until later. They are looking for a relationship, not just a quick sale.”

The Epicor ERP system and its family of modules meet all the current and expected future requirements of Present Group. In addition to technological flexibility, Epicor offered commercial flexibility in the form of a concurrent user-licensing model which would not impede growth and organisational mobility.

“A key differentiator we saw with Epicor was the benefits offered by a concurrent-user licensing model as opposed to an end-user licensing model,” explains Midgley. “If we were to remain a small to medium-sized enterprise there wouldn’t be a great deal of difference. However, if we continue on the trajectory of growth that we are currently experiencing, the concurrent licensing structure doesn’t become an impediment to growth. It allows us to have many casual users on the system and we don’t have to worry about costs when we grow our head count. This reflects the reality of the way we are doing business and the flexibility it provides was the final decider in the ERP selection process.”

The benefit of mobility
With mobile solutions from Epicor, businesses can support more customers, transactions and products, and maintain a wider range of business partner relationships. Epicor’s mobile solutions securely and cost-effectively distribute and automate subsets of existing enterprise business systems outside the company network – whether connected or remote.

“Epicor supports our desires for mobility,” says Midgley. “Our business is not based on a monolithic head office. If we want to open up an office all we need is someone in there with a browser. It gives us agility, it gives us speed of implementation, it gives us adaptation, and it is reconfigurable, allowing us to meet the needs of the new geographies we move into.

“For most other vendors we investigated, their ERP model was to put the software at the centre. Epicor allows us to have the centre wherever the activity is, so the centre is nowhere and everywhere. Epicor supports our agility, mobility and flexibility aspirations, something other products weren’t going to enable us to do. This is critical for a geographically dispersed business such as ours in maintaining social cohesion, enabling everyone to feel connected and part of the whole.”