

Zebra Pens Customer Story

Tell us about Zebra Pens

Zebra Pens are a wholesaler of pens and writing instruments to the retail market in the UK. We started in the UK in 1992 but our Japanese parents have been going since the early 20th century, and they're still owned by the same family that founded the company back then.

So, I'm Matthew Robinson, I am the Financial Controller of Zebra Pens UK, and I head of the full finance function here.

Zebra Pens have been using Sage 200 for quite a few years and it's a good system for being fair. We did enjoy using it, it's a nice easy system to use, that's obviously quite ubiquitous in the UK market. I think we needed something that was a bit more 21st century. The first one that was given is we needed something cloud based. I think we needed something that allowed us to do more enhanced reporting. I think getting into Sage Intacct's dimensions and really unlocking the kind of depths of all our different products is why we needed to make the change.

Why did Zebra Pens choose Sage Intacct?

Why Sage Intacct? I think it was a natural extension of what we were already working with. Like I said, Sage 200 was a good system, it's fine for us. I think we were slightly outgrowing it. And I think it's, or at least I've heard, it's a bit of a market leader in the SME space.

From what I've seen, quite simple and easy to use and that's borne out and having now used it for a few months, it's very slick to use, navigation between screens just makes sense. I think it's a bit of a market leader for companies of our size. We have no reason to navigate away from Sage products and I think that's been a good decision for us.

Tell us about the difference Zebra Pens have noticed since changing systems

Since changing systems, I've noticed that the general can't quite put my finger on why, but just improvement in everyone's kind of working efficiency. Maybe like I said, the slickness of navigating between screens, the logical order of how everything is laid out. If you want to go and interrogate some data, like the out-of-the-box reports, kind of logical why they're there and do let you get into some good nitty gritty quite quickly. And then of course, the custom report writer, so it really does unlock what you want to find out about your company.

Was there anything that surprised you about Sage Intacct?

What surprised me about Sage Intacct was how, in a word, freewheeling it can be.

So, you can take it in any direction you want. It's not locked. If you have an idea of how you want to lay out any process or set anything up, speaking in broad terms.

But it can handle it. As I said, through the dimensions we've been able to really just slice and dice our data so much more and I think, knowing that we weren't locked in to a developer's idea of how accountancy should be run and I can choose for myself how our department should be run, that's nice. I'm enjoying it.

Tell us about the reporting in Sage Intacct

The reporting in Sage Intacct, you can take it anywhere you want, which is the big thing. And it's really daunting as well, maybe need a bit of hand holding at the start to feel your way through it. And I know some colleagues are still a bit overwhelmed by how much there is to it you don't just get your one report and then you have to then go and work it off system. It can all be done in Sage Intacct for you. You do need a bit of thought about how to set this stuff up. You need to make sure your chart of account is set up properly. You need to get your dimensions, not right because they can be changed, but there needs to be some logical thought into them.

You do need a strong implementation partner to understand what you're trying to do. I'm not from a particularly technical background, so I have leaned heavily on itas to help me get that architecture right. You could do it yourself if you're more technically minded and I think Sage Intacct is straightforward and, on the surface, enough that you can do that for yourself if you're from a good technical background, but that's not me.

That being said, now I've been shown some kind of ways into the system as it were. I'm a lot more comfortable getting in and getting under the hood and changing things for myself.

Tell us about Zeba Pen's experience implementing Sage Intacct

Our experience implementing Sage Intacct was not straightforward. I don't really know any system change project that is straightforward and if yours was then well done to you. Our initial implementation partner I don't think understood what we were trying to achieve with the dimensions. We were trying to change our chart of accounts, the architecture of our data.

And I don't think the previous partner quite understand the changes we were trying to make at the same time as developing a new system. Whereas as soon as we picked up the phone to itas and had initial calls, they totally understood what we were trying to do. And not only understood, but they actually then suggested ways of how we can improve that and making it make more sense to get the reporting and that we were trying to get as well. Our starting point was the end point. It was we need this certain type of reporting to feedback to head office and also let ourselves internally manage the business in a better way and it was all the architecture of FNL - everything else was gearing towards how do we get that enhanced reporting compared to what we'd had previously and that was something that itas just completely understood in our case and yeah just really helped bring that kind of vision to reality.

What was it like working with the itas team?

Working with the itas team was genuinely a pleasure. So right from the initial SOS call sort of went out, then I was in a call with someone quite senior at itas and within 24 hours who was offering the reassurances that, first of all, we were talking to the right people. They understood what our issues and needs were, which they really did understand what they were. A few working days after that, we had our development team out on site talking to us, understanding what the issues were.

Getting a feel for the wider business, I think that's really important as well. Actually understanding, getting away from the systems and what's happening on a laptop for a second. Like what are we actually doing out in the warehouse? What are we actually doing with our customers? How does that work? And they were really interested in that and engaged with that. And then working with them on a daily basis during implementation and more like a weekly basis afterwards. It's a genuine pleasure

always catching up with people. We get the usual kind of football chat in early doors and then we get down to business.

Tell us about the support you received from itas.

Yeah, the support we've received from itas has been tremendous value for money. I really can't emphasise that enough. From whether it's invitations to webinars and process improvement calls, I think they were badged as. Just learning how we can use the system more efficiently on a daily basis. They've been great. And then specifically to us, the development team was fantastic and a genuine pleasure to work with and then since going live and being handed to the support team.

Tell us about working with the support team after Go Live

Working with the support team after the Go Live. It's been great. You do worry.

Previous change projects have been through that when you're going over to the support team you could be into the wild west of those generic email responses "we're so busy at the moment" okay everyone's busy get over it and we'll get back to you in five working days but it's not like that at all. You're encouraged to pick up the phone, really, I'm more of an email user but I know my colleagues they can get straight onto the phone, you get a pickup every time or even an email has responded to extremely quickly.

We've never been fobbed off in any way. Someone is very willing to get straight into the issue very quickly. Even if, I'll hold my hand up, I've got in touch with some really straightforward, should have known that for myself issues, but you're treated with respect and you're shown the way through. It really is a great experience.

How has your month-end changed since moving to Sage Intacct?

So, since moving to Sage Intacct, I've been able to cut the amount of time it takes to do month-end close. It was taking us somewhere in the region of about three and a half to four days. I'm getting it down to about two days at the moment and I think that could well be the only way to go is to get it to one day but yeah I do think in the long run we'll be able to develop the system as such that we will reduce that time. I think without any one big factor causing that it really is just the kind of slickness of the system and being able to get all the data we need into Sage Intacct very quickly. Reconciliation has done a lot with a lot more speed and then getting better quality data out of the system I can plug that into my management accounts pack and that's all automated at that end so yeah, it really has made that process a lot more simple.

How has your Ad Hoc reporting improved since moving to Sage Intacct?

Since moving to Sage Intacct, the short-term win has been the improvement in ad hoc reporting, and you always get those requests from senior management or in our case the head office team over in Japan. I think because of how we've set up the dimensions we can in system, get into the data a lot easier. You select by dimension and then it runs a report and you've got exactly what you need and just hit send. Whereas in the past we'd have had to download a big report from Sage 200, slice it up and maybe do some delimiting or concatenating or whatever way around it is to kind of join data together and then you run in pivot tables and I think, yeah, just already we've just cut all that right down. Yeah, I think if you can provide sound information very quickly, it kind of gives people the assurance that you know what you're doing frankly.

Tell us the best thing about Sage Intacct

The best things about Sage Intacct in just keeping it short and sweet are how easy it is to use, how fast it is to use, how enjoyable it is to use. Genuinely, it's quite bright and light and it's just quite a pleasure to use. You don't feel like you're straining your eyes or getting a headache. At a really simple level, it just looks quite nice to use.

Tell us the best thing about working with itas.

The best thing about working with itas generally has been the people that I've talked to. is an absolute pleasure to deal with, they are genuine people who care about me and care about the business and that's huge. I think you have to get it right at a personal level first. This is something that's huge and integral to our business.

The people have to be right. I can't be in a position where I'm almost scared of reaching out to someone through fear of just having a bad interaction. So, I think that's huge. And then it clearly comes across how knowledgeable they are about the product, which is very reassuring. We're a small business. We don't have the luxury of in-house IT developers. So, we're really relying on that expertise. Getting complete value for money out of what we're paying, and I've got complete assurance I'm getting that from itas.

If you're wondering about whether to go with a smaller name that you may not have heard of in the industry or go with one of the more traditional consultancy arms, I'd say at least go and have a conversation with itas, listen to them, listen to what they do because they really are experts. They know their product absolutely inside out and I think their approach to doing business with you, understanding what you need out of a system.

Yeah, it's been really first rate and it's been really refreshing. I've never really had an experience like it. So at least give itas a call before you go to anyone else.