



## Using TickITplus to control software development projects and improve IT management, boosting profitability and reassuring customers

“TickIT provided the benchmark to create reliable, repeatable processes, putting an end to ‘firefighting’ and freeing up time and space to enable us to innovate and delight our customers. We thrive upon the challenge of new projects in the knowledge that we will consistently deliver quality products and services on time and to budget, every time... TickITplus has started us on this journey, and paves the way for further improvement.”

**Sara McCartney,**  
Finance and Operations Director, Geoplan

### Customer objectives

- Strengthen software lifecycle development management processes
- Cut application development time and costs
- Benchmark the quality of IT processes
- Build customer trust
- Boost business performance

### Customer benefits

- Enhanced project management control
- Major time and cost savings
- Proven best practice in IT management
- Embedded culture of continuous improvement
- Improved employee morale and motivation
- Increased profitability

## Customer background

Geoplan provides advanced geographic information solutions (GIS) to improve the business performance of its customers, many of which are large global companies. The company specializes in location analysis for business planning, based on the supply of information linked to postcode or location. It offers a wide range of products and services, from GIS data, to highly sophisticated bespoke mapping software. Put simply, it offers solutions to everyday business problems that are too complex to work out manually – or are easier to understand if they are represented on a map.

Established for 25 years, and based in Harrogate, North Yorkshire, Geoplan is increasingly profitable achieving sales of £1.7m in 2013. With a specialist team of 18 people, it has become one of the first UK SMEs to achieve certification to the new IT quality benchmark TickIT<sup>plus</sup>.

## Why TickIT?

Geoplan's standards journey began in 2001, when the company recognized that its people and processes were the cornerstones of its business and it needed more solid foundations for both. Geoplan achieved certification to the globally respected quality management system standard ISO 9001, which strengthened its business processes. The company also adopted the well-established Human Resources standard Investors in People (IiP), which improved the way it managed and developed employees.

Whilst the new standards brought undoubted benefits, Geoplan realized that further improvements could be made. Sara McCartney, Finance and Operations Director, explains, "We offer consultancy and tailored solutions to world class organizations, so our people and processes need to be robust enough to deliver the high level of quality and service that they demand, in a way that is profitable and sustainable for us." McCartney continues, "The backbone of our business is software and software applications and we felt that TickIT would build on ISO 9001, strengthening our software processes."

TickIT provides extensive guidance on how to apply the requirements of ISO 9001 specifically to IT and software development. McCartney is frank about the company's motivations. "We were not doing it to 'get the badge', we had real business problems to solve," she says. "We were inconsistent in the way we approached software development projects, relying on individuals doing things in different ways. At

## TickIT<sup>plus</sup>

that time, the reality of trying to deliver projects on time and within budget could be something of a terror ride!"

## Implementing TickIT

The introduction of TickIT became part of a broader change in business culture at Geoplan. "We used to have a quality manager responsible for championing our business improvement initiatives and getting certification. But despite having the frameworks in place, we still didn't feel we were consistently and proactively working to world class standards," says McCartney. "We felt best practice was somehow 'hovering above us' rather than embedded within us."

Geoplan set about 'changing hearts and minds' within the company, replacing the individual role of quality manager with collective responsibility for business improvement through a process of internal review. This new collaborative approach resulted in constructive criticism, informed decision-making and a workforce that was motivated by problems being addressed and its own involvement in rectifying them.

A fresh 'Geoplan business management system' was developed, underpinned by all the firm's management system standards, with TickIT becoming key to a quality-led approach to new software development.

## Benefits of TickIT

TickIT has played a pivotal role in ending Geoplan's rollercoaster ride on certain software projects, contributing to its ability to deliver improved profitability and productivity year on year.

Certification to TickIT, achieved in June 2004, embedded the rigorous requirements into Geoplan's previously haphazard project management processes. McCartney says the software development standard, alongside Geoplan's other certifications and wider cultural change, transformed the company's approach to projects and its performance. "TickIT provided the benchmark to create reliable, repeatable processes, putting an end to 'firefighting' and freeing up time and space to enable us to innovate and delight our customers. We thrive upon the challenge of new projects in the knowledge that we will consistently deliver quality products and services, on time and to budget" she says.

## Transitioning to TickIT<sup>plus</sup>

Having derived extensive benefits from TickIT certification, and with its powerful customers seeking greater assurance from service

providers, Geoplan saw an opportunity to achieve further advantages from the scheme's successor, TickIT<sup>plus</sup>. In November 2013 it became one of the first UK SMEs to achieve certification to TickIT<sup>plus</sup>, providing a public declaration of its commitment to quality. Under TickIT<sup>plus</sup> this commitment covers the integrity of all Geoplan's IT processes.

"We wanted our Software Development Lifecycle processes to be visible to the wider team, and not seen as a dark corner," explains McCartney. "With TickIT<sup>plus</sup> this is less and less of a 'black box' – we are achieving greater transparency in this area, which is supporting stronger, more robust integration of key processes across the business."

She continues, "It puts the onus on us to demonstrate ongoing business process improvement by requiring us to set clear objectives with tangible measures. The maturity model used for TickIT<sup>plus</sup> [the scheme offers silver, gold and platinum levels of achievement for organizations to aspire to] means you don't just reach the standard and 'stop' – with TickIT<sup>plus</sup> the expectation and framework is there to support us in getting better and better."

## BSI's role

Geoplan has worked closely with BSI from the start. McCartney comments, "BSI has been an incredibly strong partner for us. The high calibre of its training and assessors has been absolutely critical to our journey."

McCartney has been especially impressed by BSI's gap analysis process. "The assessors have always taken time to understand our business and made it clear where we've been lacking. They still 'tell us how it is' and really dig deep to ensure the standards are adding value for us, feeding our continual improvement process," she says.

Geoplan's financial results show its impressive improvement. In 2004 it made a loss of £141,000 on turnover of £1.63m, with annual productivity per employee of £62,000. In contrast, in 2013 the firm recorded a profit of more than £400,000 on sales of £1.7m, and productivity per head had risen to around £100,000.

But McCartney is not resting on her laurels. Having already used its transition to TickIT<sup>plus</sup> to address some longstanding improvement areas, she is now intent on Geoplan striving for higher levels of maturity. "Platinum status is definitely the aim," she declares.