

## O&M I.T. Ltd – A Brief History.

The story about the start of O&M I.T. and how things have moved on to the present

### **In the beginning:**

Back in 2004 Rob Wilcox was working in website and database development and not particularly enjoying it. So it was fortuitous that during a pleasant country walk and subsequent drink at the local pub with a good friend who was a contract manager in a London-based fitout / refurb company that the conversation moved to the subject of project handovers and O&M Manuals.

The CM said it was always a pity that at the end of a good project that the last thing to be handed over and one of the few things that would carry the name of his company was a set of less than impressive O&M Manuals. Not only that, but it was usually the site manager who had to build the O&Ms at the end of the job when he/she really should really have been putting their time towards what they do best – ie overseeing the project at probably the busiest time of the whole job.

Typically, the O&Ms would consist of various drawings, manufacturer's literature and test certificates and some textual content. Although much or all of the required content was there, the overall impression was that the manuals were scruffy, not very user friendly and did not reflect well on the company.

It was there that the idea was hatched. "Why don't you offer a service doing O&M Manuals?" he suggested.

Rob had previously been a draughtsman in the Royal Engineers and later spent a while as a maintenance manager in a leisure centre. He also had a good working knowledge of computers. So with a reasonably good background in things relating to O&M Manual production he thought he'd give it a go and the company was born shortly afterwards.

### **Our team**

Very soon, there was too much work for just Rob, so Sharron joined the company. Sharron had retired from a successful banking career working on the financial markets in Sydney, Hong Kong and London but was now after something to do. She had no real experience in construction or in authoring or compiling technical documentation but that didn't affect her ability to compile and produce Operation and Maintenance Manuals.

A valuable lesson was learnt here. It was much more important to have someone with a tenacious, well organised attitude towards work than someone with a whole lot of construction knowledge but a timid or haphazard work manner.

Within a year the work load had once again exceeded our capacity so Rob head-hunted an old friend Michala (previously a project coordinator) who had the right character traits for the work. Mich joined us and we moved into a larger office.

Dawn (also previously a coordinator and great friend of Michala) joined the company shortly afterwards as a part timer before quickly becoming a full time worker. She was followed by the addition of the self-employed workers, Charlotte, Emily, Sean and Kaz. Following some pretty intense training at our office, they all work from home by remoting into their computers at the office and using the same server as the full time staff.

Then there came the M&E technical authors in the form of Malcolm, Terry and Peter. These are a wise, grisly and very experienced bunch of self-employed professionals who have worked around the world on all sorts of jobs ranging from residential fitouts to new build power stations.

Finally, Alison (who spent a number of years working for a large construction company) joined as a part timer and Toby; previously a work experience placement, continued as a part time graphic designer.

## How we developed

There were a few things that were decided upon quite early on:

- Knowledge of construction work although useful, should be of secondary importance to the ability to multitask and having the 'dog with a bone' mentality towards getting information and finishing a job on time.
- Working with family and friends (if chosen correctly) was a benefit, not a problem.
- We set ourselves aside from so many of our competitors by resolutely refusing to give up on the all-important information gathering process, no matter how difficult it proves to be to obtain. We have heard many times how such and such company only emailed twice and made only one phone call requesting info before giving up.
- Working from home and using remote workers was preferable to renting unnecessary office space and then transferring the overhead to the customers. We can keep our prices competitive by minimising expenditure. It also helps reduce our carbon footprint so benefits the world in a small way.

## O&M I.T. company ethos

### Provide a personal service

As more and more of the rest of our lives have become automated and computerised, it soon became clear that there was still a need for a hands-on personal service in the O&M compilation business. As long as humans are required to supply information that they really don't want to be bothered with, there will be a need for other humans to hassle them for it or do it for them.

### Persistence

We beg, plead, pester, threaten, cajole and 'grass up' subcontractors who fail to supply the information that we need to complete the O&M Manual on time. Sure, it makes some people irate but those who count, ie our clients, get their O&M Manuals on time and therefore their clients are also happy. Generally, those who are slow in supplying information soon realise that we don't give up and end up supplying the information on time on subsequent jobs thus making our lives easier and enabling us to keep costs down.

### Delegation of responsibility

Encouraging 'ownership' of clients by members of our team was better than trying to control everything centrally. If one of our O&M Coordinators has worked well with a certain client it makes sense for them to continue to do so and to gain the rewards from having developed the relationship.

## Where we are now.

Now, a decade later, 2,000 or so Operation and Maintenance manuals down the line and with 12 people working for us, the company is still growing whilst retaining most of our valued clients.

## The Future

O&M Manuals, Health and Safety files, Building user guides, BIM, Building manuals, Occupier manuals, logbooks and the other variations of handover documentation are not going to go away and are unlikely to get simpler.

There are various semi-automated database systems that are attempting to make things easy but in our experience the simple fact remains that they are still confusing enough for a growing number of construction professionals to opt to get people like ourselves to take the task away from them so that they can get on with what they are best at and be assured that their O&M submissions will be done correctly.

So, moving forward it's a case of if it isn't broken, don't fix it, but, at the same time keep an eye on new legislation and technology.

We shall continue to offer a good service at competitive prices and if we get too busy to keep up, we'll employ more people using the tried O&M I.T. way outlined above.