



A.G. Coombs streamlines work processes and complies with pandemic safety protocols using Smartsheet

With Smartsheet, leading building services specialist A.G. Coombs can digitise paper-based processes, securely track data to meet public health requirements, and increase the effectiveness of both internal and external collaboration.

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Our users want to analyse data. I steer people toward creating a comprehensive metric sheet and using formulas to slice and dice the information into something that can be inserted into a dashboard. I've built 10 to 20 dashboards in the last couple of months, quite complex ones too.

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Gavin Cheetham, Group Building Information Modelling (BIM) Manager, A.G. Coombs



Customer:

A.G. Coombs

Industry:

Architecture, Construction and Engineering

Organization Size:

Medium (50 - 999 employees)

Region:

APAC

Website:

agcoombs.com.au

Customer Profile:

Founded in 1945, the A.G. Coombs Group is the leading Australian building services organisation that provides an integrated range of whole-of-life technical services for all systems in buildings. A.G. Coombs has a national capability with major operations on Australia's eastern seaboard.

Background:

Digital technology is fundamental to the design and construction of innovative new buildings. Founded in 1945, the A.G. Coombs Group is a leading specialist provider of building services, providing an integrated range of technical services for all systems in buildings from air-conditioning and mechanical services to fire protection, electrical and lighting, and building control technologies.

Solution:

The use of Smartsheet has allowed A.G. Coombs to streamline multiple work processes, helping to improve the standards for safety, operations, and delivery of client services.

"By far the most useful tools enabling flexibility are cloud-based tools," says Gavin Cheetham, group building information modelling (BIM) manager at A.G. Coombs. "They can be used anywhere – work, home, café – and they allow us to do email, file sharing, communications from wherever we work."

One of the company's digital information gurus, Cheetham focuses on providing clients with a consistent approach to the implementation and leveraging of digital engineering, from early design all the way through to ongoing service and operations. His 35 years of industry experience have taught him that technology can be a powerful differentiator in both construction operations and business process management. Smartsheet is part of his digital toolset and is integral to A.G. Coombs' ability to increase return on investment (ROI) for internal processes and client services alike.

"We've made ROI comparisons between manual and Smartsheet workflows, and it's like chalk and cheese," Cheetham says. "The time savings can be significant. Further, it's absolutely critical that we measure what we do leading up to a change and then post-change; of course, to get an ROI proposal over the line, you need to estimate what

Customer:

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the post-changes might look like. I use Smartsheet to record a number of investments we've made over time, and I use monthly reminders to record a number of key metrics on each of these. This can then lead into an ROI piece to prove that the investment did save time and money."

Digitalisation to prepare for the unexpected

A.G. Coombs has been using Smartsheet since 2017 to digitise paper-based processes and help eliminate duplication and inefficiencies. Cheetham says that while administrative workflows have seen the greatest benefit, Smartsheet has saved significant time in engineering design, worksite safety management, and other client-facing areas. The company has taken more of its business processes fully digital, which helped ease the transition when the COVID-19 pandemic brought lockdowns to the region.

"Leading into Christmas last year we did a large piece of governance work to get our unified collaboration systems in place," Cheetham says. "We did something similar for Smartsheet at the same time, so when COVID hit we turned that tap fully on. We pointed our people to our systems and training, and we ramped up the use of Smartsheet. The impact of having systems in place was really important. Our people have been trained over time to align with internal standards, so without these standards there would have been a lack of trust from our people. We are still working through various change management pieces to ensure no one gets left behind."

Supporting a variety of COVID-19 compliance requirements

Construction work was able to proceed during the pandemic, with a large number of safety requirements implemented to help limit the number of people at worksites, monitor and report on employees' compliance, and follow up on potential

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exposures through contact tracing. This required capture and tracking of a wide variety of data.

A.G. Coombs' Smartsheet solutions for COVID-19 include an office cleaning checklist with detailed reminders; site staff mapping to record exactly where all employees were throughout the course of a workday; and daily staff surveying to track potential symptoms and contacts with other people, enabling the HR team to follow up appropriately on confirmed cases among staff members or their contacts if required.

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Data is captured in a dashboard that lets managers monitor the status of their teams, and automated reminders ensure that people complete surveys and checklists required for their roles. Because Smartsheet is easy to use and learn, A.G. Coombs was able to quickly develop and deploy a variety of specialized solutions to meet government requirements across work locations and activities.

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A platform for growth and innovation

Cheetham says Smartsheet is an important part of the company's adaptation to pandemic working conditions, not least because it can help restore the kinds of natural communication that used to happen in physical offices. Even when the pandemic lockdowns end, those capabilities will continue to be important as the company continues to grow.

Smartsheet also helps A.G. Coombs employees collaborate more effectively. Cheetham says a recent report showed that nearly 100 licensed users were able to share information with more than 1,000 external collaborators.

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Future Smartsheet projects underway include a companywide initiative to develop a standards repository that will provide a single place for essential information. A.G. Coombs is also developing client-facing initiatives such as an asset management system that will aggregate signals from sensors and data from on-site observations to track the status of building systems and enable preventive maintenance. Cheetham says the increase in the number of projects will require a more comprehensive approach to training, supported by the vast amount of information available through the Smartsheet Learning Center and online community.

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“That, for me, is an amazing outcome,” Cheetham says. “That’s people who don’t pay for licenses but at the end of the day, they collaborate with A.G. Coombs. Those numbers continue to go up as we move forward on our Smartsheet journey. We’re saving a significant amount of time, and we’ve done some pretty amazing things.”

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