

Building a Financial Infrastructure to Support Rapid Expansion

Room to Read

Challenges

Building a Financial Infrastructure to Support Rapid Expansion

Room to Read is an international nonprofit organisation that has improved literacy and girls' education across 20,000 communities around the world. Having benefitted more than 12.4 million children and with a goal of reaching millions more, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) has experienced extraordinary growth – reaching \$50 million in annual revenues. After rapidly expanding to offices in 10 countries, Room to Read's management team saw an opportunity to scale these efforts even further. They recently implemented an "Accelerator" model that involves partnering with local government agencies and other NGOs to bring Room to Read's expertise into new geographies.

Amid these changes, the organisation hired a new CFO and decided to replace its server-based general ledger system with a more robust financial infrastructure to support increasing complexities and long-term growth. "At Room to Read, we are obsessed with measuring programme outputs, such as the number of library books produced and checked out, the number of teachers and librarians we've trained, and the number of participants in our programmes. However, our financial information simply wasn't granular enough to add meaningful insights like cost per activity or investment per child," explained Shari Freedman, CFO at Room to Read. "We were excited by the prospect of obtaining financial data that was tied to operational information and could tell a more informative story about our progress over time."

Room to Read went in search of a new cloud-based system that could handle its varied donor reporting requirements, provide multi-entity, multi-currency capabilities, and offer global support for accounting and finance staff around the world. The NGO chose Sage Intacct and worked with its implementation partner, Armanino, to plan and design an entirely new general ledger structure, transfer its historical data, and automate financial processes.

Solutions

Improving Productivity with Faster Reporting and Consolidations

By leveraging Sage Intacct's dimension capabilities, Room to Read dramatically streamlined its chart of accounts from 56,000 to just 100 accounts and can now tag transactions with details such as specific programmes and locations. This enables the organisation to easily filter, group, and organise financial and operational data for more efficient, detailed reporting. Room to Read also benefits from Sage Intacct's many best-in-class integrations, including seamless connections with Salesforce for operations data; Adaptive Insights for financial planning; and Nexonia for timekeeping and expense report automation.



Room to Read®

Company Overview

Room to Read is a global organisation transforming the lives of millions of children in low-income countries by focusing on literacy and gender equality in education. Founded in 2000 on the belief that World Change Starts with Educated Children®, its innovative model focuses on deep, systemic transformation within schools in low-income countries during two time periods that are most critical in a child's schooling: early primary school for literacy acquisition and secondary school for girls' education.

Executive Summary

Results with Sage Intacct:

- Streamlined consolidations across 25 entities and 19 currencies
- Increased donor confidence through more specific and timely reporting
- Scaled easily with rapid growth, improving productivity >25% for both worldwide field operations and global finance teams
- Software paid for itself in <6 months

BUILDING A FINANCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT RAPID EXPANSION

This transition to Sage Intacct eliminated massive Excel spreadsheets and hours of manual, duplicate data entry both at the organisation's headquarters and in field offices around the world. As a result, Sage Intacct dramatically reduced the work needed to close the books in each country, freed up teams for more value-added analysis, and made consolidations across all 25 entities and 19 currencies a much simpler process. All told, Room to Read's field operations experienced a 25 percent productivity improvement with Sage Intacct—or the equivalent of about \$300,000 in annual savings on labour. The global accounting and finance team also achieved impactful productivity improvements of 30 percent, thanks to their combination of best-in-class financial systems that eliminated the need for three full-time employees who performed manual accounting functions.

In addition to saving time, Sage Intacct enabled Room to Read to provide more specific information to donors about the projects they are funding. "When we were on our previous accounting software, our data structures only allowed us to look at average costs across all 7,000 donor-funded libraries. It was all but impossible to get donors the specific information they wanted about how we were managing against their particular budgets," said Freedman. "Thanks to Sage Intacct's dimensions, we can now drill as deep as we need to, even down to the costs of a single library in a certain village. And the process is much more efficient, allowing us to meet any deadline we commit to with confidence and provide more strategic insights when creating donor proposals and reports."

Solutions

Boosting Credibility Through Accurate, Timely Data

Room to Read's finance team pulls statistical programme outcomes from Salesforce, combines that with financial data from Sage Intacct, and brings it all together in Adaptive Insights for highly collaborative and transparent planning. "We can track all of our expense types throughout the lifetime of a programme – including everything from training teachers or supplying materials for the children to research and evaluation," shared Freedman. "When a large federal or corporate donor funds a multi-year literacy programme across multiple schools, we can accurately report back the specific cost associated with each programmatic component, as well as the programme's impact to date, which increases our credibility and accountability as an organisation. We would not have been able to do any of this without Sage Intacct."

Each country office also has its own dashboard in Sage Intacct, with relevant information like employee travel expenses, outstanding reimbursements, and the ratio of employees per child benefitted by region. Room to Read relies on this visibility to support data-driven performance management and find areas where it can better optimise its impact. In the near future, this financial infrastructure will help the NGO answer other critical questions like, "If we had an extra dollar per child, would it be best spent on another day of training, another set of books, or something else?"

"After comparing Sage Intacct with other products, our corporate and field teams all agreed that it was intuitive, dynamic, and flexible enough to capture all of our operational complexities. What made the decision especially easy was the company's 'customer for life' philosophy, which assured us that Sage Intacct could effectively carry us into the future."



Shari Freedman
CFO
Room to Read

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