

## R WITHERS PLC

R Withers PLC established Withersnet, an online system to providing insurers, loss adjusters and engineers with 24/7 access to a network of supplier partners specialising in subsidence repairs.

### OBJECTIVES

Insurers, loss adjusters and engineers seeking companies to carry out building repair works, have to find companies with suitable specialisms. But this has historically been difficult, inefficient and resource-hungry. By default, large companies would often use national businesses with local, smaller companies missing out on the opportunity to compete for such contracts.

Managing Director, Robert Withers, was determined to set up an online system – Withersnet – to provide a single point where insurers, loss adjusters and engineering clients could contract with partners. And also provide those partners with a knowledge base of downloadable information from the website.

Bringing together clients with regional or local providers could reduce the costs of transaction and management for all parties, as well as benefiting the policyholders.

### SOLUTION

Withersnet combines the functions of a business portal content management system, with standard web applications. It allows clients and contractors to access data via unique usernames and passwords, through a standard internet browser.

“The Withersnet website is purpose-built as a hub. It is simple to use, yet covers every aspect of delivery and client support,” says Robert.

The system notifies building companies of new work from insurers and loss adjusters, and allocates work directly to contractors. It also progresses and files information about each job through each stage – including generating standard reports and letters, and performing electronic filing. An added resource is the shared best practice area for contractors.

“Often innovation is not the outward display of novelty, but how effectively and simply the developer has invisibly delivered a solution,” says Robert. “There is very little in Withersnet that wouldn’t be understood by anyone with experience in this area. In bringing all of the control and management ingredients together into a single package using the very latest tools, we have delivered an innovative total solution.”

**Best practice in:**  
Supply chain

**Sector:**  
Construction

**Size of firm:**  
50 employees

**Location:**  
Croydon

**Website:**  
[www.withersnet.net](http://www.withersnet.net)



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ROBERT WITHERS – MANAGING DIRECTOR

## RESULTS

In a dry summer, claims for building problems such as subsidence can quadruple, leading to problems for insurers which cannot match supply of repair with demand. There are also increasing demands to meet Financial Services Authority (FSA) regulations, with compliance and good practice.

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For contractors, an e-mail alerts them to a new job which, once opened, links to all the relevant documentation on the site sent by the client.

“Without the website and the Withersnet contract, the regional contractor would not have access to this ‘nationally contracted’ work,” says Robert.

The company has already benefited by winning a national contract to be the sole provider for subsidence substructure repairs with one of the UK’s leading construction and loss-adjusting companies.

The cost of setting up Withersnet was around £30,000, covering a combination of IT development costs and external consultancy needed to determine the business plan and internal changes required, and to specify the Withersnet system.

The website is now being used as a key part of a strategic business development plan to move R Withers plc from being a regional to a national company.


R Withers PLC is a regional winner in the supply chain category in the DTI and InterForum E-commerce Awards 2004.

## CHALLENGES

Estimating the time needed setting up Withersnet plan proved harder than was expected. “You always need more time than allowed for,” says Robert. “You need to set tight deadlines to provide the focus and pressure for delivery. Plan to be prepared to compromise but without jeopardising the objectives.” Although Withersnet was produced on budget and with the required functionality, it did overrun on time.

To some extent the adoption of the technology was a learning experience for R Withers PLC, which discovered that project planning is tricky. “The technology is smarter and more cost-effective than you expect,” notes Robert.





Now, the company is in complete control of the website, and can add and remove pages, and maintain an extensive downloadable library of best practice topics without any dependence on IT expertise.

**Top tips:**

- Do not launch into web/IT solutions unless you have a clear business need and plan.
- It is essential to know your business objectives, and understand your requirements in detail yourself. Do not expect the IT provider to know what you want.
- When you think web, think nationally; how could national access to your process, systems or control transform your overall presence in the market?

**THE LAST WORD**

“What we have learned along the way with regard to repair networks and the needs of the market, and how we might apply it and learn from it, all give us additional opportunities outside our core area of expertise,” says Robert. “Using the technology has not just given us a new edge in our particular area of repairs. It has given us knowledge and understanding commercial and technically which we know will have other value in the market.”

“The system gives us the platform over the next three years, that previously as an SME we could not have considered, for us to continue to build national presence, contracts and turnover for our core business and that of our partners, and to continue to forge strategic relationships with key clients,” concludes Robert.

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