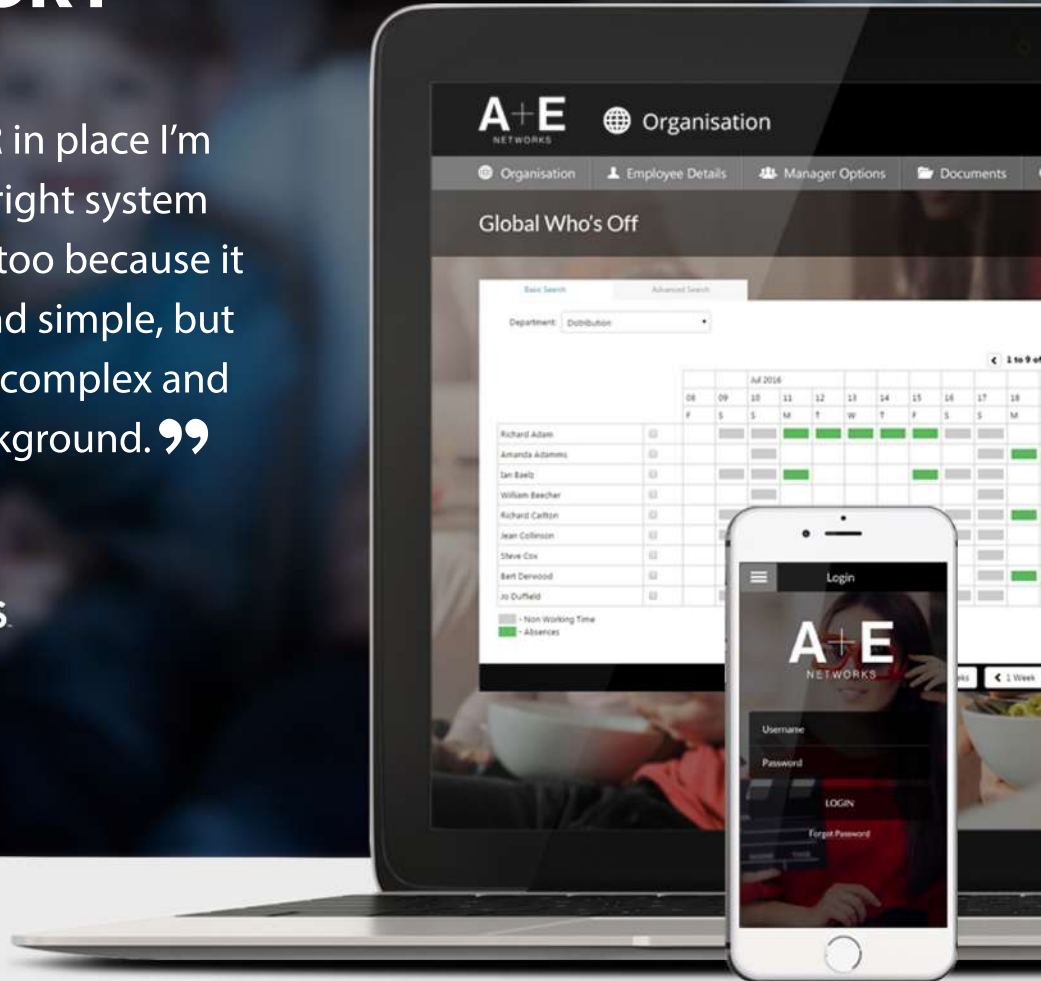


CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY

“ Now we have CIPHR in place I’m very happy and it’s the right system for us. My team loves it too because it is so straight forward and simple, but it does a whole array of complex and clever things in the background. ”

A+E NETWORKS



ABOUT A+E NETWORKS

A+E Networks UK is a television broadcasting company with four channel brands that launched in 1995 as a joint venture company between BSkyB and A+E Networks in the US. Over the years, A+E Networks UK has brought many of the functions shared with SKy back in-house and, as a result, has grown to become a company of around 150 employees

- Operate 3 cable networks with 11 television channels
- Own the History channel, now known as History
- Launched in 1995
- 150 employees

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WHY DID A+E NETWORKS NEED AN HR SYSTEM?

A+E Networks UK is a television broadcasting company with four channel brands that launched in 1995 as a joint venture company between BSkyB and A+E Networks in the US. Not only did Sky contribute the broadcasting platform, it also shared a large number of major business services and facilities with the joint venture company, including access to office space, transmission and tape storage facilities, finance, marketing and HR resources. Over the years, A+E Networks UK has brought many of these functions back in-house and, as a result, has grown to become a company of around 150 employees.

Until recently, all operational HR was carried out by Sky. This meant that all recruitment was under the Sky banner; advertising jobs, reviewing candidates through the Sky portal, onboarding successful candidates, developing contracts and then passing details to payroll (which was also done by Sky). This meant that technically, and legally, all A+E Networks UK staff members were essentially employed by Sky, operating under Sky contracts.

In 2008, the new managing director of A+E Networks UK decided that the company needed its own HR function to take a strategic approach to employee engagement and development. Hollie Mann, Senior Director for HR and Business Operations, was chosen to lead the new drive with an HR and Office Management remit. Increasingly, she found the operational HR relationship with Sky impractical in meeting the growing company's needs and in early 2013 the two parties began talking about separating the services. She comments, "It was very clear that Sky no longer had the capacity to run the HR function for us and they were looking at the increasing risk to them as an organisation of working with our company in this way. So, we set out to bring all recruitment in-house, as well as payroll, onboarding, health and safety, occupational health and employee benefits. It was a massive project with an original ambition of a challenging 6 month timescale."

She adds, "We had been set up as a department within Sky's HR system. We didn't find it to be very intuitive, it was not very visually appealing and was a bit clunky to use - and it didn't really operate how we wanted it to. Because we hadn't maximised employee self-service we had a lot of administration for the HR team in terms of managing things like holiday bookings. The change presented us with an opportunity to introduce a new HR system that would closely meet our company and staff needs."

LOOKING FOR A SOLUTION

With limited time available, a "Request for Proposal" process was not possible and so the shortlisting process relied on market/industry research, recommendations from colleagues and friends, magazine scrutiny and online searches. This identified a number of appropriate system providers and these were invited to present and demonstrate their solutions to the A+E Networks UK team. It was then that it became clearer what was required.

Several approaches to HR were considered, including on-premise software, SaaS HR systems and outsourced services. However, in the end, the search was narrowed to two software providers, CIPHR being one of them. Following meetings and a system demonstration, CIPHR was chosen because it delivered all of the functionality required at the time and provided the breadth and depth of features required to grow the system over time. As Hollie said, "We wanted to have the functionality there to switch on when we needed it." The CIPHR solution also proved the most cost effective and was able to offer existing integration with other A+E Networks UK providers (such as Thomsons Online Benefits for employee benefits and Accord payroll).

Musing over the choice that was made, Hollie adds, "The system demonstration was a great help in making our decision. CIPHR is simple to use, really intuitive and user-friendly. Its external-facing employee and manager sections are attractive, yet very simple and easy to use. All stakeholders in the project saw the product demonstration and presentation and they all bought into the system from the start."

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HR IN THE CLOUD

One of the key attractions of CIPHR was that it is cloud based, so that A+E Networks UK does not have to manage its own data. Remote access is possible from anywhere in the world, with no loss of speed or performance for the users.

Hollie adds, "Another reason for choosing the system was that we are expanding internationally, we run our channel brands in multiple territories across EMEA and we have started setting up offices in those regions. So, we wanted something that was cloud based that we could use internationally and that had international currency. It was important that we could deliver certain functionality to the regions, such as employee self-service. The first region to do this will be Poland and we will be bringing in a CIPHR consultant to sit down with our Polish HR Assistant to configure their side of things in a way that works for them."

PUTTING THE SYSTEM IN PLACE

As a broadcasting organisation, A+E Networks UK enjoys a creative and informal, dynamic and buzzy atmosphere. The CIPHR consultant quickly got the measure of the customer and adapted her style to really work well with the HR team. Hollie comments, "We worked together incredibly well and we enjoyed ourselves. Her knowledge of the system was brilliant. The speed with which she understood us and our company was excellent and she had a natural way of explaining things, helping us to understand, keeping it simple but not patronising."

For the implementation phase, A+E Networks UK also called on the expertise of HR Insight (part of the Kingston Smith Group) for project management which worked closely with the technical team from CIPHR to ensure a smooth and positive experience throughout. As a result, CIPHR was delivered to specification and on time.

A number of CIPHR consultancy days were delivered as part of the implementation phase. These proved invaluable to the A+E Networks UK team as detailed by Hollie, "I was very happy with the consultancy days and will take the same approach with other implementations in the future. It was so useful having the consultant sit down with us and our live system to actually go through the pages and help us to configure everything to our requirements. They were able to show us what the system is capable of, giving us the options for what we might want to do, getting to know our business and making recommendations based on their findings. This approach meant that we understood what had been set up and why and, importantly, how to make changes in the future."

An unavoidable delay to the project changed the timelines and the scope of the project. The delivery date was moved back to July 2014. CIPHR was able to adapt its approach and project plan to continue implementation on the new timescale with no hitches.

RINGING IN THE CHANGES

Once the green light was given the new system was launched to the users and the HR team was able to surge ahead. Hollie comments, "Now we have CIPHR in place I'm very happy and it's the right system for us. I'm being asked for reports that I used to have to do manually, but now I can pull together really easily. It's so easy to put employees in and the onboarding is working really well. My team loves it too because it is so straight forward and simple, but it does a whole array of complex and clever things in the background. The support we have received from start to finish has been great and I've already recommended it to other people in HR roles."

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Employees have accepted CIPHR readily and the feedback given to date has been positive. As an organisation presenting quality content programmes, image consistency is key and everything they do needs to reflect this. The system has been branded throughout and new employees are immersed in the corporate culture right from the start, when they go to the onboarding portal to pick up their contracts. Here they see glossy images about the shows and information about the company and its shareholders.

THE FUTURE

A measured approach to the HR system will continue with more functionality delivered to employees and managers, including facilities for training and development. A focus for the HR team will be to familiarise staff with the new system and encourage employees across the organisation to naturally turn to CIPHR for all people-related data and information. This will require a fundamental culture change that will result in a dramatic fall in the administrative burden of the HR function. All integration with other systems is completed and single sign on to 'Your HR system' and 'Your Benefits' is seamless.

Hollie concludes, "Opening up functionality, getting more information on the system and delving into the data analytical capabilities of CIPHR Decisions are the main priorities moving forward. Being able to cut data in different ways and explore the system further will clearly demonstrate the value of our new HR system."

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