

Helping accountants escape Excel hell



Michèle O’Gorman, Founder of Ciall, talks to Accountancy Ireland about her firm’s commitment to solving ‘reporting’ problems from a finance professional’s point of view.

Tell us about your background and your firm, Ciall.

Ciall was initially founded to solve a glaring problem in the areas of group consolidation and management reporting. We saw lots of inefficiencies in that space and we decided to build a consulting practice that offered solutions that were borne from the accountant’s perspective, as opposed to that of the IT expert.

I have a background in finance and prior to Ciall, I held roles in M&A, banking and industry as a financial controller. While working with ABB Group in Vienna, I was involved in deploying large-scale consolidation and budgeting solutions for industry, and that was how I originally got to know the type of products we offer at Ciall. I returned to Ireland to start the business, and we have been in operation for almost 20 years now.

What can Ciall offer to Chartered Accountants, both in practice and industry?

From a corporate performance management perspective, we offer a product called BI360. It’s a Microsoft-based product that provides an alternative to spreadsheets for the entire financial reporting and budgeting process. It can be applied beyond financial reporting, but that is where we tend to start and it is an ideal solution for medium to large companies with a significant group reporting function and some degree of complexity.

When we meet potential clients, we often find that they are drowning in spreadsheets or Excel hell. BI360 takes the pain out of this process by providing a solution for management reporting, consolidation, budgeting, forecasting, the production of KPIs

and dashboarding all within one product. So instead of buying separate solutions for each of these individual activities, they are offered in a modular way within BI360. As the only authorised BI360 partner in Ireland, we have built successful relationships with blue chip organisations such as C&C, Sisk, Dalata, Airbus and Independent News and Media.

The other side of the business provides enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions through the Microsoft Dynamics NAV platform. This is a full-scale ERP solution that covers everything from financials to warehousing, distribution and manufacturing.

In terms of integration, can these systems work with organisations’ existing software and IT solutions? Absolutely. When we first meet a

client, we will typically find that they are working on several platforms and systems including ERP, CRM, human resources and payroll. BI360 usually becomes the organisation’s central repository for core business data from all these systems, which allows the client to conduct management reporting, consolidation and budgeting activities from one place.

With Microsoft Dynamics NAV, as with any ERP solution, the client will typically also need to integrate the system and take data feeds from or send data to other solutions. As both products leverage Microsoft technology, they have very strong integration tools so we can move data freely and seamlessly.

What degree of collaboration do you provide throughout the planning and implementation process?

We invest a lot in the early stages of engagement to understand what the client’s requirements are. This begins with a discovery process – an initial meeting or two to understand what the requirements are, what the pain points might be, what the budget is, what other products they’re looking at and what they’re trying to achieve. Once we are both satisfied that there is a broad fit, we will then conduct a series of presentations to explain at a high level what the solutions, investment and timelines might be. If there is agreement to move ahead with the project at that point, we then conduct a series of scoping workshops to flesh out the detailed requirements. This process is quite detailed and provides the client with full clarity in terms of what will be involved in the project.

For Ciall, the actual implementation project is a collaborative process. One of our unique assets is the fact that most of the consultants working in Ciall have a background in accountancy or financial control. All client-facing staff have worked in finance roles and know the pain points. They also know a whole range of systems through their years of experience and we approach all projects from an accounting and process perspective. In truth, we’re a



Michèle O’Gorman, Founder of Ciall

lot less about the technology – we’re accountants and financial experts implementing IT systems rather than the other way round.

What else sets Ciall apart as a service provider?

The subject matter experience that we bring to the table given our financial backgrounds is our primary advantage, but longevity always counts. During our 20 years in business, our delivery expertise and track record has proven invaluable in the successful delivery of our projects.

Also, as a focused implementation partner delivering two core solutions, the owners – myself and Michael Horgan – are very much at the forefront in terms of business development and the sales process. Instead of meeting people who are trying to reach sales targets, clients meet Ciall’s owners who carry the values and ethos of the business.

And we stay close to our clients. While we of course have teams of consultants who do implementation work, run support services and so on, you will never be handed off to a team of people where there isn’t continuity. Indeed, every client signs up for an ongoing support contract. A project might run from three months to 12 months and once the project is live, we then move into the support phase. Ciall runs a helpdesk and clients have unlimited access to Ciall’s support team for anything they need.

How do you stay at the cutting edge?

The companies that we partner with are investing and innovating all the time. Take the ERP system as an example – Microsoft is our partner and with its capacity to invest, there’s lots of evolution and new releases. They offer a host of solutions that are tightly integrated and that are at the forefront of cloud-based ERP and business solutions. As a partner, Ciall has early access to their solutions and that allows us to stay current.

BI360 is a similar story. The parent organisation is highly innovative and is now releasing a new generation of cloud-first business intelligence and reporting tools. Ciall is one of the lead European partners and as a result, we have the inside track – we have sight of the product roadmap and access to all of the collateral and content early in the lifecycle of these products. It’s also important to note that the BI360 cloud product is delivered through Microsoft’s Azure cloud platform, and operates to Microsoft’s highest security standards.

Lastly, what type of Chartered Accountant or organisation would benefit from a discussion with Ciall about their IT platforms?

Ciall works with medium and large organisations that are predominantly using spreadsheets to handle management and other types of reporting, or are looking for a new, up-to-date ERP solution to replace an end-of-life system or platform.

The greatest benefit will be realised when an organisation with a degree of complexity – multiple entities, jurisdictions, lines of business or currencies, for example – approaches us. Such an organisation is likely to be at a stage where Excel is creaking and the finance team is looking for a way to put structure on their consolidation, reporting and budgeting processes.

That’s where we get involved, with a constant focus on driving change from the finance professional’s point of view.



MICHÈLE O’GORMAN
Michèle O’Gorman is Founder of Ciall, an IT solutions provider. Michèle can be contacted at michele.ogorman@ciall.com.