

SOFTWARE IN THE CLOUD IS HERE TO STAY – BUT IS IT FOR YOU?



Cloud Computing is one of the current buzz words in the IT industry and covers a multitude of different areas, and therefore causes confusion. All users of a smart phone are effectively 'Cloud Computing' by recovering and saving information via the cloud – i.e. externally hosted servers. Cloud Computing is therefore just accessing software (programs, data or both) on external servers, hence 'in the cloud'.

The advantage of Cloud Computing is that it provides the facility to share data entry, removes the capital expense of installing servers and the time investment required to maintain them. Understandably some users will be deterred by the fact that their personal financial information is no longer held within their own office walls.

Another disadvantage of Cloud Computing is that it is entirely dependent on a reliable internet connection. Therefore if you are operating from a city centre office the service will be excellent, but the opposite may be true if the office is in the middle of the countryside – as many of our clients are!

From an accounting and property management software perspective there are pros and cons to Cloud Computing. For a customer with a single computer in the

office, used by one or two people, then there is minimal benefit from cloud hosting.

If however, your business operates from several sites, or access from multiple locations would be advantageous, then a 'hosted' or cloud based offering may be appropriate.

Landmark can now provide KEYPrime Accounts & Property as a hosted solution, with the number of users and their required access levels individually allocated, therefore providing an additional level of flexibility.

Installations to date have included a land agency practice where remote workers and a remote client needed access to the data, and an estate operating from two different geographical counties now benefitting from shared data.

As with all IT purchases investigate carefully before you "jump on the cloud". Ensure that the service provider is robust and that you have access to your data backups. Investigate the costs and don't get blinded by low monthly fees, versus upfront network costs. A £49 monthly payment looks great, but it is worth remembering after only three years you will have paid nearly £1800!



2015 READY FOR THE CHALLENGE?

Nigel Parsons, MD of Landmark

The general public rely on agriculture to produce the food to keep the supermarket shelves full. Few outside the agricultural industry would be aware of the effect of massive grain price reductions (partly cushioned by good yields), CAP reform altering traditional cropping rotations and introducing greening options, with of course extra hoops to jump through. We have all this ahead of us alongside some exploding world population statistics which can only be good for the food production industry.

Our role, as software suppliers is to ensure that the necessary information is recorded, and that management information is available to support the decisions that need to be taken. We are able to offer not only the software, but also the support, expertise and training to make your systems work efficiently, so please ask.

As well as traditional farming our software is now used by a diverse range of rural businesses, from caravan parks to castles, farms to forges and shops to solar farms, we are always looking for new challenges!

An Interview with Robert Law

Robert Law has hosted CEREALS in 2010 and 2014 as well as keeping pace with managing 1900 ha of mixed farming enterprises in Hertfordshire and Nottinghamshire.



When Nigel Parsons (MD of Landmark Systems) first met Robert Law in 1977 as a fellow student on the Harper Adams Agricultural Marketing and Business Administration (AMBA) course it was obvious who was the practical farmer: "Robert showed a great knowledge of everything outside the lecture room, and crop walking definitely came before statistics!"

Q. Robert how did you get into farming?

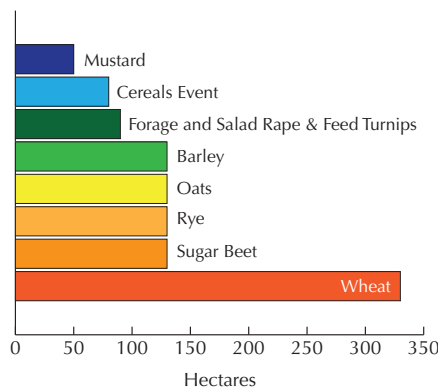
A. I am a first generation farmer, my father was a Newmarket solicitor and aged 14 he sent me off to do work experience on a client's farm. An idea to get me out of the house and to earn some pocket money changed my life - I caught the farming bug very quickly. My wife, Frances, is from a farming background, and our two girls are interested in land management and farming so the genes are there strongly now! I chose the AMBA course at Harper as I had no land ties and I have never regretted it. I have found the business training invaluable.

On graduating, I won a travel award and worked on farms in NZ and Australia. In 1981 I was appointed Working Farm Manager at Thrift Farms. It was a grand title as I was the only employee! I moved into share farming with the landlord and in 1988 I bought him out of the farm. Since that time I have expanded through renting land, contract farming and managing land for others until the farm today is roughly 1900 ha.

Q. How does Cereals, the event, fit into the mix?

A. We have hosted Cereals twice at Thrift Farm with a four year gap, it takes up 80 ha all in. The 2,500 lambing ewes graze 250 ha and we crop 1100 ha of arable enterprises mainly on contract to Jordans and Ryvita, part of Associated British Foods, and Allinsons. For the year prior to Cereals the preparation is part of the arable rotation. It is full on for the month before the event, but I enjoy meeting the people and getting involved with Haymarket, who run Cereals.

Thrift Farms – 2014 Cropping



Q. All this needs managing – despite your love of farming, how do you organise your office?

A. In 1982 I spent 95% of my time outside and 5% on administration. Today, that has virtually reversed. I spend far too much time in the office now even though back then I did the wages and VAT myself. I am lucky to have Valerie Bradford, the Farm Secretary, she started 16 years ago and has gone from one morning a week to three days a week and used KEY Accounts from the beginning. Valerie and the arable manager David Hurst are the IT literate ones! I have a great stockman, Andrew Kirkpatrick as Livestock Manager, but he and I don't get involved with the data inputting. We have just upgraded to KEYPrime with Gatekeeper and the big advantage is that we have absolutely everything on one computer including field details, previous cropping and the linked accounts. When we made the move to Gatekeeper

it was the right time to take advantage of the KEYPrime enhancements. In my business I know what to ask for and I concentrate on the things where I can make the most impact, financially and physically. I believe that you should try to keep doing the things which you enjoy doing in farming.

Q. Growing from a small tenancy to multiple tenancies with land ownership perhaps means that at times you have had to find financial support? How important is it to have management information at your fingertips for business planning?

A. There are times when tendering for a contract, or when buying land that you need a lot of relevant information for example on crop margins, cashflow and machinery spend. The importance of remote access to software and email is huge too in terms of reducing travel time, with a good agronomist on site I rarely have unplanned visits to Frances' family farm in Nottinghamshire

Q. How does hosting Cereals impact on your business?

A. There is an obvious impact of having over 500 exhibitors and 26,000 visitors on 80 ha. One guy came back after the event and said he had lost his car keys; we had sprayed off the site and started cultivations! Of course you want everything to look absolutely pucker, which means hard work but when cereal prices drop between signing the contract and the event it is a good financial option. Two key elements for the host are looking after your neighbours and car parking – try to think outside the box to minimise complaints and keep the traffic flowing.

Q. Which Technology is making the biggest difference to your business at the moment?

A. Without doubt Precision Farming is making great strides. Every two years we are adding to the sophistication of the soil analysis and in cab steering guidance systems which enables more accuracy, less fatigue and less waste. GPS is not an extra any more – it is a must!

Making it Happen!

The move to KEYPrime explained with some client advice



One of the biggest barriers for anyone upgrading to new software is the fear of Data Conversion. "The very sound of it conjures up the thought of risk but there are people, tools and technology to support you through the task making it fast, easy and safe. You just need to know what your choices are and what to expect," says Mary Collis, Director of Training and Support, at Landmark.

THE OPTIONS EXPLAINED

FDC (Full Data Conversion)

Your current open year data sets are taken by Landmark and all data is transferred. Good for tracing historical data.

Advantages:

- You don't have to wait until year end, fiscal or financial
- Choose time of Data Conversion to suit workload
- One year's historical plus current 'open' year transactions included

Disadvantages:

- Most expensive option, because it is labour intensive
- You will be without your data for a few days (dependent on size of company) whilst the migration takes place

OSC (On-site Codes Only)

On-site with a trainer using a mobile re-configuration tool. All the paperwork to hand and the trainer's undivided attention!

Advantages:

- Your data stays on-site
- You plan the timing at year end with your trainer
- You can combine the session with some training
- Chance to re-organise the coding structure
- New features demonstrated in your office

Disadvantages:

- No transactional data transferred (current or historical)
- Needs to be timed with year end

COC (Codes Only Conversion)

Your codes are stripped out at Landmark. Data is entered by you from the start of the new financial year with your familiar codes in place.

Advantages:

- Starts the New Year on the new program
- Everyone works in advance towards the known date for transfer
- Less labour intensive for Landmark, therefore more flexibility on timing
- Less Costly

Disadvantages:

- No transactional data transferred (current or historical)
- Needs to be timed with year end

Kenny Campbell Slagnaw Farming Ltd on FDC

"I did not have anyone on-site; it was an absolutely straightforward, seamless process. All the old information from KEY Cashbook was put onto KEYPrime. The helpdesk never say you should read the handbook!"

Louise Wickenden, Farm Administrator on FDC

"Migrate as much historical information as possible and plan your timing. Choose a week when you can comfortably allow a backlog of inputting, do the FDC and then book the trainer so that when they come out there is a pile of invoices to work with. This is the best way to learn the program and to take the opportunity to clear out a few old codes."

Jasper Biddulph, AJ & LP Biddulph on OSC

Having on-site conversion at year end meant that I was due a visit anyway, the conversion was done quickly and putting in the new data myself would have taken much longer. I did not realise that KEYPrime was such a big change but the features are useful and quick, such as opening up invoices from the payment screen.

Alex Woollam, CR & GM Woollam & Son on OSC

The whole thing happened quickly and easily and I hardly realised that it had been done. It was a pretty painless process.

Charlotte West, Self employed Secretary on COC

"If you are a small business Codes Only is a good option because you don't need to look up many debtors and creditors or multiple standing orders. Or, if you are downsizing this is a very good opportunity to reduce your codes and the defunct history so you start on KEYPrime with only your current working codes. DO plan ahead and allocate some time to decide what you want in advance."

Mary Collis adds:

"As you choose to transfer over to KEYPrime please discuss it with us so that we can guide you through the options, plan the most appropriate timing for your business and be sure of a slot in our schedules."



The Landmark annual social event to the Harry Potter Film Set - feel the magic!

HERE ARE A FEW OF MY FAVOURITE THINGS!

Read some client feedback on KEYPrime features

Hayley Cobden
Witcombe Farm Partners

"It is very practical and the analysis and reporting is easy to do for accountants and project managers. I like the cashflow report and importing budget facility from Excel."

Jasper Biddulph
AJ & LP Biddulph

"KEYPrime is a big change for me but some of the features are useful and quick; I like opening up invoices from the payment screen. There is plenty of space for detail on the Purchase Invoices. I am impressed by the standard of both the technical and software support."

Alexander Hunt
The Walnut Tree Company

"Landmark helped to set up the invoices for our two companies just how we wanted them. The way it does the invoicing saves time and we will notice this even more during our busy Christmas period."

"The Debtors list and P & L are needed regularly as performance indicators and these can happen on demand at the press of a button - no more double entry. I then get a very useful report listing the individual invoices due under the name of the debtor."

Louise Wickenden
HW Twyman

"A lovely feature is Drill Down from Bank Reconciliation – click on the figure and it takes you to the invoice and you can change it on the screen."

"In the Customer Ledger (reports) if somebody hasn't paid you click on their name and it comes up straight away, not having to search for an invoice number is time saved."

Charlotte West
A. E. Dawe Estates

"Really enjoying your bank rec., I like the sorting facility either A- Z or numerically higher to lower which makes it easy to spot odd figures."

COMPARATIVE DATA – ITS VALUE AND YOUR OPTIONS

The ability to compare the results from different businesses within the same sector can provide thought provoking, and interesting results.

Within an individual organisation our Consolidator Module can be used to draw together the results from multiple sets of Accounts to provide comparisons, for example across different farm units or estate ownerships, as well as providing a 'consolidated' view of the overall business performance.

Many clients also contribute to external comparison and benchmarking schemes, including those run by Kite, Smiths Gore, Andersons, The Dairy Group and many others.

This year we have prepared some guideline notes to assist clients to participate in the Savills Estate Benchmarking Scheme. In KEYPrime the process is made even easier because 'Groups' are an integral part of KEYPrime which means that the essential sorting of properties by type comes naturally! Property details are easily identified and exported for sorting and reporting therefore minimising the need for extra configuration.

Savills draw together data from over 200 participants covering more than one million acres in England and Scotland for their survey, and it is open to all estate owners. Contact Ian Bailey on ibailey@savills.com for more information, or our support lines for the guideline documents.



Scotland's Rural College

Vision Statement: Leading innovation and sustainable development in agriculture, land and the rural sector.

Landmark is delighted to announce that KEYPrime Accounts is being set up on seven college farms located across Scotland. The software has been selected with a view to increasing the efficiency of communicating shared management information and comparative data.

