

Case study: Brown & Carroll

Brown & Carroll polishes up its project planning with Powerproject Enterprise

**BROWN &
CARROLL
LONDON**

About Brown & Carroll

Brown & Carroll London has been managing major commercial fit-out projects with high-quality specialist joinery for many years. It prides itself in being a 'no fail' business which always delivers to the most exacting customer needs. Maintaining that reputation is business crucial – which puts project planning excellence firmly in the strategic spotlight.

As it expands into new markets, including heritage and luxury residential, the importance of careful project planning continues to grow. Brown & Carroll has been using Powerproject for over a decade to help it deliver on time, every time. It recently brought in Powerproject Enterprise to help it manage its commitments across multiple projects which are ever-growing in scale, and was very impressed with the quality of support provided throughout the implementation.

Specialist contractor Brown & Carroll London has a spotless reputation for delivering high quality work. With expertise in high-quality joinery, today it utilises far more than wood, creating stunning interiors spanning metals, textiles, stone and light.

The reputation of the business rests not



just on the quality of its work, but its perfect delivery record. The company has not missed a handover for an enviable 25 years.

Planner Matthew Kingston carries a lot of responsibility for sustaining the company's delivery record. One of the tools he relies on most is Powerproject. The use of the software has grown in recent years, as Matthew described: "We've been using Powerproject for as long as I can remember. It used to only be used to do things such as plot where we needed to install joinery on site. Today, when we get programmes and dates to install to from our clients, we work backwards

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from there. We use Powerproject to undertake full programme detailing for design, manufacturing and installation, as well as progress reporting against all these activities, and resource planning.”

The software is used to help make projects manageable in terms of planning timelines and resources alike: “All our projects are input into Powerproject. As the market increases we are producing more and more bespoke joinery, and need to be able to show our workload graphically in order to plan towards handovers, not only on current live projects but on upcoming and future projects.”

Expanding requirements

Brown & Carroll is going from strength to strength, now approaching £50m annual turnover, with constant growth and big plans for the future. It has recently expanded into the heritage, luxury residential, hotel and restaurant

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space. Consequently, its need for project management is expanding too, as it must drive and monitor progress on multiple, often multi-million pound, contracts. To manage the growing workload, Matthew is now training up another person to work with him and use Powerproject. He told us: "These days we tend to have fewer simultaneous jobs but they are larger with much more value in each one. We have just converted to the Enterprise version of Powerproject and we are building separate programmes within it to enable us to assign resources effectively. It means we can now have an overview of all our projects at one time. At the moment we are juggling six live jobs. They have their own complications because they split packages up, one job might be comprised of three packages in three phases. It may be one job, but there are 12 different things to manage."

“ Although it’s really easy to use, the training was helpful, as it showed me several shortcuts. ”

Activities are diverse, time-consuming, and need careful end-to-end project management. Delivery timeframes vary hugely. Brown & Carroll often designs and develops very specialist items, which may often take several months to move from design and approval, through ordering and manufacture, and then to installation. Explaining the timelines, Matthew told us: "Our work is never off-the-shelf. We may have around 8 weeks for design and approvals, then manufacturing can take anything from 6-15 weeks, depending on the item. However, really specialist items could have lead times of 12-14 weeks just for the manufacturing stage. In that case it might take at least 16 weeks to get it to site to install it, and that last part can take another couple of weeks. Even just the manufacturing stage can't be managed as a single programme bar, but is a full sequence of works. Powerproject provides the perfect setup for such a sequence, as you can chop and change it to improve things."

The team uses Powerproject to help it prioritise and manage activities on some extremely large projects, where such programmes could run to tens of thousands of lines. Matthew explains how he might manage this for the outfitting of a multi-storey tower block which might have two or three apartments on each floor: "I create hammock activities for aspects like our design and drawing of different items. We can manage groups of activities to apply for specific needs, linked to a particular drawing for a particular location, then can assign resources to it. It helps us manage multiple similar items – for example, we might have 20 different joinery items on one single level, and another 20 on another level."

Bringing ideas to life

Brown & Carroll's specialism is taking client ideas and bringing them alive. While some of its jobs seem superficially similar – such as outfitting a reception area or a tea-point – each is approached uniquely, and with the highest possible design values. Balancing design with delivery practicality is a constant challenge. Using Powerproject Matthew works to create re-usable processes that can adapt to its wide variety of typical projects. He said: "We have a number of typical sequences we undertake, and have to adapt them to suit each item. There is no typical programme: everything is built

specifically. I've built a lot of task pool templates that sit on the side, with typical hours allocated. You can drop them into a programme, but they then need tweaking. Like a tea-point, for example: the core is similar, so some items are repeatable – but they are never the same. There are different details, some are more complex, others are quite simple like fitted kitchens. A tea-point can be anything from a simple unit, up to a full specialist finish on everything inside and outside the units, Corian worktops, glass elements and so on."

“ I find the software really user-friendly – I've tried to use MS Project and I just can't work with it. I've grown attached to Powerproject, and it's hard to switch because others aren't as easy to use. ”

He continued: "Clients often ask for the impossible and even, sometimes, the ludicrous, in terms of joinery design. Whatever they request we must turn it into something deliverable. It's our job to turn their vision into workable joinery somehow – perhaps by changing materials – to do what they are after just with a slightly different look. This



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could be materials that aren't readily available, that do not meet sustainability requirements e.g. FSC/PEFC, or that are on a long lead time. Being able to demonstrate this enables the Design team to put forward solutions within the time we have available to achieve the best result."

Last but never least

While every trade in the construction business understands the pressures of deadlines, the Brown & Carroll team is at the sharp end on almost every occasion. Matthew expanded on this: "Our biggest challenge is that we are a finishing trade. We're often the last guys in before handover to the client. So we are super-constrained in terms of the end date. If a preceding activity is delayed due to unforeseen circumstances, then it impacts us and there may not be an opportunity to recover that delay by extending the handover date. The way we have to achieve this would be to accelerate our works, so being able to see this on the programme software it enables us to manage this across all our works and prioritise activities."

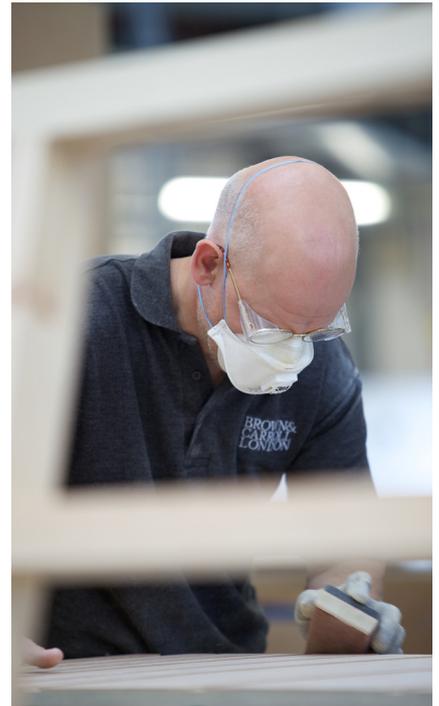
Being the last trade, the Brown & Carroll team is used to being in the firing line, and has long since recognised that it needs clear information to inform internal discussions, and strong evidence to present to clients, especially if handover is impacted by a change. Matthew described the

process: "We build our sequences in Powerproject, then do a progress dropline with comments against it. If we've finished the designs and issued them to the architects, but the line shows we should have had drawings back, our contract managers can see that the impact will be a delay of two weeks. The software helps us to raise early warning flags and is a good tool for communication: we can go into a meeting and demonstrate the delay, by showing the dropline and the implications."

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An easy software choice

Matthew finds Powerproject to be easy and enjoyable to use, as well as useful. He explains: "I self-taught myself on Powerproject, so I had some training recently to refresh myself. Although it's really easy to use, the training was helpful, as it showed me several shortcuts. It's a massive programme, but if I come across something I don't know how to do, I can just send Elecosoft an email and ask – they quickly say if you can do it, and



tell you how. There's nothing it can't do that I've come across, yet." He added: "I find the software really user-friendly – I've tried to use MS Project and I just can't work with it. I've grown attached to Powerproject, and it's hard to switch because others aren't as easy to use."

The support and training from Elecosoft are equally appreciated: "The support and service we get from Elecosoft is first class – it can't be faulted thanks to their quick responses, knowledgeable answers, easy to follow instructions – and they also never fail to follow up afterwards."

He concluded: "We use Powerproject because it is the best software on the market – miles ahead of any other product. We develop complicated programmes, but in Powerproject they are easy to put together, as you can just copy, paste and drag drop from task pulls, and it's easy to move everything around. It takes all our information inputs and provides reports, filters and many more options which enable us to cater for every department and ensure that we are hitting our targets – every single time."



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