

Fruit of their payroll labour worth a look



PAYROLL SOLUTION

By
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We all know that it's healthy to eat fruit daily. It's bloody expensive though these days, especially if you want the good stuff like strawberries or pineapple.

God help you if you're buying it out of season. You end up carrying home two little shopping bags of fruit for your family for \$50, and half of it ends up rotting in the fridge.

But hey, it's good for you, right?

I went shopping with my grandmother last week. She just turned 89, and she is fussy about her produce.

"I only eat Ontario strawberries because they're sweeter," she said.

Well, I promised her that the huge California berries were very sweet. It took some convincing to get her to spend the extra cash; she's on a fixed income you know.

One week later, we were shopping in that same store, and I asked her how the berries were? She said, "Fantastic. Sometimes it pays to spend the extra money for the good stuff."

What about fruit for your business? No, I don't mean that you should buy your employees a regular supply of fruit around the office – although, that is a great wellness idea.

I'm talking about ORANGE Digital Systems, developers of the EMPulse Series suite for payroll and human resources (HR) solutions. Remember WinPAY? Same company.

I had an enjoyable telephone interview with Leora Walter, who is a senior account manager with ORANGE, and Philip Ifrah, the sales and marketing manager. Walter was a sales and marketing consultant prior to getting in the payroll game, and Ifrah, who has an MBA from the Ivey School of Business in London, Ont., mostly worked as a software engineer and developer before joining the firm.

The first question I begged of them was, "Where the heck did you get the name 'ORANGE' from?"

It turns out the company was formed in 1987, and its founder felt that the name highlighted his business philosophy.

Here's the actual quote: "Like an orange, we only develop solutions that are full of flavour, con-

tain no fat (unnecessary features) and are beneficial for your company. We invest in the health of companies." Ahh, what the heck, it's all in good fun.

Orange Digital has been based in Montreal for 20 years. They are privately owned and have users all across Canada.

The total number of companies using their product is around 400, including a few payroll service bureaus. They mostly focus on selling direct to the end user, but they do have a re-seller network set up.

Ifrah pointed out that they are far from an "off the shelf" solution, so a re-seller must have a certain skill set level in order to qualify.

Although their product fully meets the requirements of all provinces, ORANGE is proud to be able to handle some very specific rules for Quebec. All modules are completely bilingual as well.

Here is a sample of what ORANGE Digital's EMPulse Series HR management system has to offer:

- Separate payroll preparation and payroll processing modules. This unique concept accommodates clients who want to continue using a service bureau for processing.

- Unlimited configurable pay items including earnings, accruals, benefits, time banks, expenses, reimbursements and deductions. The system is delivered with all the pay items you need, including ones that may be specific to only your company; plus, you can easily add new deductions yourself as the need arises.

- An advanced rate resolution feature that automatically identifies and applies the correct rate/wage depending on what an employee does on each project. It's well suited to employers who need to adhere to wage policies mandated by the government for skilled labour or by the company itself. Each employee can have an unlimited number of wage rates, should their duties be that diverse. Walter said that the depth of this particular feature is "unsurpassed in the industry." Bold words, but I guess it's difficult to surpass something that is unlimited.

- Advanced time banks and accrual management for companies with complex rule-driven accruals or time banks for overtime, sick time, flex time, vacations, etc. – "You name it," said Ifrah, "and EMPulse can automate its calculation, no matter how complicated."

- The timesheet entry and approval module allows employees to record information on exactly what they did on any given day.

Managers can approve the time and expenses entered by their team directly on the screen or on

a printed timecard.

- The project costing module uses the information from the system's timesheet facility or from an external system for multi-level cost and project accounting right down to the general ledger – brilliant for companies that need to track specific projects and the proportional costs for each.

One point came up many times during our conversation. The EMPulse Series HR man-

agement system is particularly well suited to companies with complex labour contracts and strict union rules.

resources management system with whatever ERP system you are using. A typical install is with an Accpac product, Great Plains or Navision, but they can set it up to work with any system.

I like to have a little controversial fun when I'm writing. It's not hard to do, all I have to ask is "What do you feel are the advantages of payroll software over a service?" or vice-versa, depending on who the interviewee is.

Ifrah and Walter had some

more difficulty accommodating that.

"For example, changes can be made on the fly to deductions, rates, calculation rules etc., with out any waiting."

Next, they said that EMPulse allows users to make the best of their own historical data.

Although a service can supply a report, it does not allow the user to experiment with different parameters, without paying per report and waiting for it to be delivered.

Their slam dunk point was that there are no monthly fees. The average payback time for an ORANGE Digital customer is between eight and 18 months. And so the debate continues.

I have a feeling that if my little old grandma was in the market for a payroll/HR solution for her complex unionized payroll requirements (ha!), I'd convince her to spend the extra coin for the good fruit.

"Although their product fully meets the requirements of all provinces, ORANGE is proud to be able to handle some very specific rules for Quebec."

Warren Beesley, columnist

agement system is particularly well suited to companies with complex labour contracts and strict union rules.

In fact, it can accommodate more than one set of union rates and regulations.

That is a unique capability that makes ORANGE Digital an ideal product if your company is, say, a multi-union manufacturer or construction firm.

It is also ideal for transportation companies and not-for-profit organizations.

A typical ORANGE Digital client has between 200 and 2,000 employees. Companies with less than 100 employees may find them a bit expensive for their needs.

Installs can range from \$15,000 to over \$100,000 depending on the size of your company and the complexity of the implementation.

While we're on the topic of costs, ORANGE's annual fee for unlimited telephone support, online payroll updates and maintenance is 18 per cent of the initial software cost, excluding the implementation cost.

Multiple locations are not a problem. Access is available through the internet by logging on to the user company's main server.

There is an additional charge up front per concurrent user, but the number is unlimited. ORANGE's report generation is unique in our industry. Whereas most developers use Crystal Reports, EMPulse includes a custom report generator.

Right out of the box, it can handle complex government or industry specific reporting with multiple formats that are customizable by the user.

It is still capable of linking with the aforementioned Crystal, but most users find they don't need to.

ORANGE Digital can link their EMPulse Series human

resources management system with whatever ERP system you are using. A typical install is with an Accpac product, Great Plains or Navision, but they can set it up to work with any system.

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Ifrah and Walter had some great points in favour of software, which is no surprise.

In fact, Walter's first response to the question was "everything." She clarified by saying, "First of all, increased control and flexibility.

Users can set it up to fit the specific requirements of a company, whereas services have

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