Customer Success Story
Freedom Church & ApprovalMax

Streamlined expense management of a rapidly growing multi-location church

#Churches #NotForProfits #FinancialControls #Multi-Entity #Bills #Expenses #UK

"Limited staff, remote teams, and large numbers of invoices – the expense management of our rapidly growing Freedom Church required urgent attention.

In the UK alone, Freedom Church currently has six church locations as well as several central offices; each one with their own utility/rent bills and personal expense claims. All expenditure need the approval of both the local church leaders and the UK facilities manager, making a UK-wide coordination of bill approval extremely challenging!

ApprovalMax is just perfect for managing the expense claims and other bills generated by our UK-based churches and the central team; we run everything through this app."

JEZ HAILWOOD
Finance and Systems Director

Organisation
Established in the UK over three decades ago, Freedom Church expanded rapidly over the past eight years. From one to fifteen locations across nine countries and three continents as well as an increased annual turnover from £60,000 to over £1m in the UK, where the central team supporting all international locales is situated, makes for a massive success story.

Type of organisation
Churches & Charities

Location
United Kingdom, South Africa

Limitations of paper-based accounting in churches & charities with remote teams

Following a substantial expansion, Freedom Church now has a distributed UK finance team and uses Xero as the accounting system; having migrated from Sage in 2015.

As so often with churches and charities, they rely on a growing number of volunteers rather than many core staff. This leads to a lot more personal expense claims, which Freedom Church used to treat as regular bills that had to be submitted manually. What's more, these expenses originate from multiple locations and require the authorisation of various budget holders (church leaders, finance team, etc.).

In early 2017, Freedom Church realised that their paper-based approval process was incredibly inefficient, hard to track and impossible to scale. As paper bills and personal expense claims require the signature of remotely located budget holders, it just didn't work with distributed teams.

The continual territorial growth and increasing number of new locations presented a major organisational challenge. It left the finance department overworked and often caused delays in bill payment and personal claim reimbursement. Consequently, streamlining the management of utility/rent bills and expenses became urgent.

Streamlined expense management based on automated approval workflows

Bill Automation with ApprovalMax makes expense management straightforward and a real difference to the Freedom Church finance team.

All spend requests now go through Xero + the ApprovalMax Bill Review and Approval workflow, which uses Xero tracking categories to reflect locations and departments. Budget holders approve via email or smartphone, followed by the finance director if amounts exceed a certain threshold.

Today, Freedom Church is nearly paperless. Geography isn't a limiting factor anymore; budget holders can see how a bill was coded, leave a comment, make edits. And volunteers get reimbursed promptly.

Benefits achieved

- ✓ Fully automated bill review and approval process
- ✓ Multiple location support without expanding the finance team
- ✓ Reporting and detailed audit trails ensure audit readiness
- ✓ Approving from email and on the go boosts productivity

"We needed a more advanced approval workflow than the one Xero provides, and ApprovalMax does a great job! Specifying Approvers based on various criteria (we mainly use our location and department tracking categories) enables our budget holders to properly approve spending for remote teams," **– says Jez Hailwood, Finance and Systems Director.**

The Approval App You'll Love Using

ApprovalMax extends the online accounting platform Xero with approval-driven financial controls for Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable. It replaces paper- and email-based approvals with fully automated multi-role and multi-tiered approval workflows, and ensures spend control and regulatory compliance for both internal accounting and financial service outsourcing organisations.