

In partnership with the  
Association of Consulting  
Architects Australia

MANAGEMENT  
FOR  
DESIGN

# Business and Practice Management Systems Survey Results

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NOVEMBER 2018

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# Background

Management for Design and the Association of Consulting Architects (ACA) have recently conducted our second **independent** survey of Business and Practice Management Systems used by, and available to, Architects, Engineers and Consultants in the Australian marketplace. This is the only comprehensive survey of this information undertaken in Australia with the actual users.

As you are aware there are a myriad of business and practice management systems available to your business and the industry to manage your **finances, projects, clients and documents**. Currently there is minimal independent information describing the effectiveness of these systems and minimal expert assistance regarding making the right choice for you and your business.

**The purpose of the survey** is to research and assess the functionality, effectiveness and importantly the use of the various business systems used in practice. The results are a summary of the actual users experience and we hope to assist you to make a more informed decision around what's right for your business.

The work involved:

- Investigating the technologies available in Australia
- Formulating and distributing the market survey
- Collaboration with the Association of Consulting Architects
- Analysing the results of the extensive market survey.

We have collated the results of over 210 businesses across Australia varying in size from 2 people to over 500 people—an increase of 20% on last year. Thanks to those of you that provided responses to the survey.

# Insights 2018

20% of our respondents have implemented a new system in the last 12 months. Of those:

- **50% of new users are either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their new system!** In particular, there is a low level of user satisfaction with the introduction of new project control and resource management systems
- However, there is a reasonable level of user satisfaction with the introduction of new accounting, time and invoicing and client management systems

There are no systems across project control, resource management, and client management that are consistently rated “very effective” by our respondents. This is consistent with last years’ results

Xero is the only accounting system considered “very effective” – although Deltek Vision, MYOB and QuickBooks are considered “effective”. Xero is also considered **“effective” or “very effective” in over 80% of businesses**

There are a number of systems that manage time and invoicing that are considered effective or very effective. These include: Deltek Vision, Harvest, Xero and BST. And this is consistent with last years’ results.

There are **many project control systems that are used and not considered “effective”**, including systems that have only just been implemented! This is a concern considering this is one of the key foundations of any project centred business.

**41% of respondents did not have a resource management system** in place at all and approximately one in three businesses with more than 5 people do not have a system specifically designed to manage resources. Not great considering this is one the keys to business performance

Almost **60% of businesses don’t have a system for managing client relationships** i.e. clients, contacts, leads, opportunities, activities, prospects. While most of those that do have a system don’t consider it effective

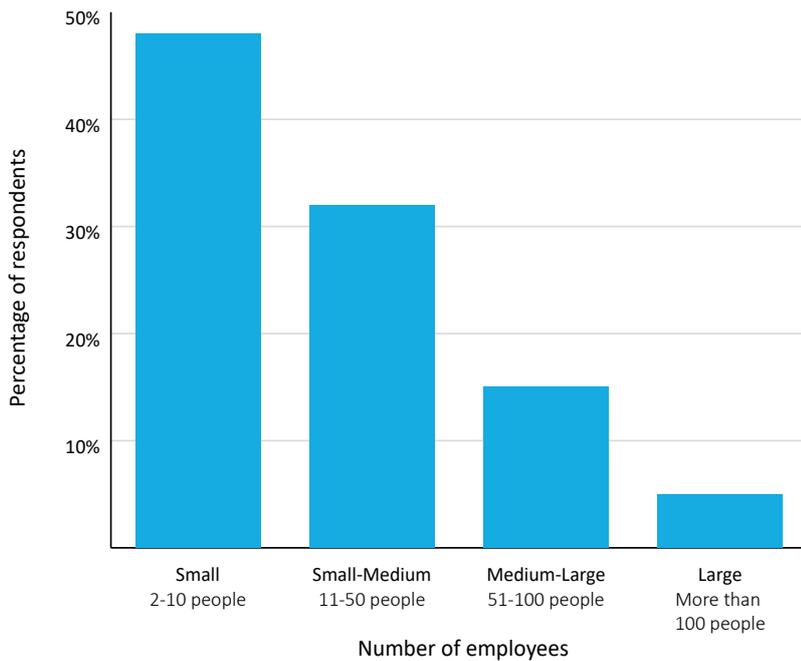
More than **40% of businesses don’t have a formal document management system** – this is a similar result to last year. Having said that Newforma and Aconex are considered to be effective systems by the respondents

The most common platforms for managing contract administration are MS Office, Excel – 23%. Newforma is rated highly by our respondents



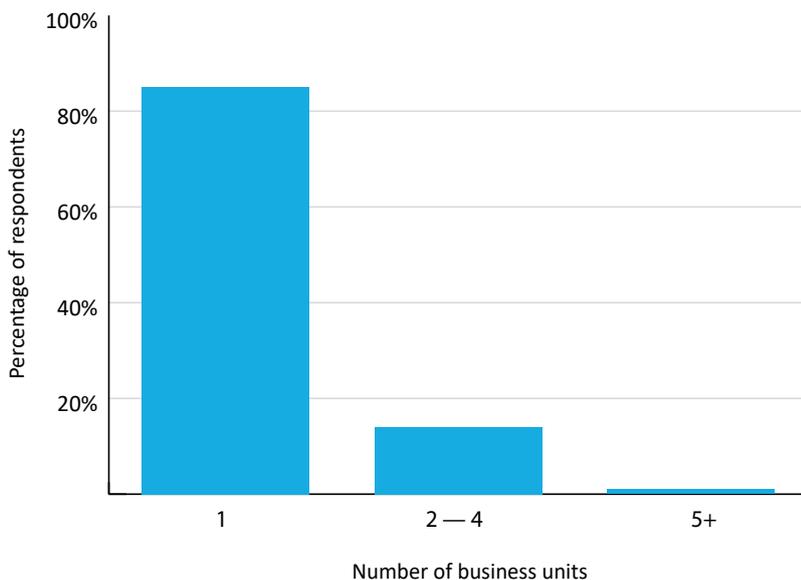
# Respondents

How many people are in your business?



The highest percentage of our respondents have 2-10 people in their business

How many business units do you have?



Most of our respondents have one business unit

# Results

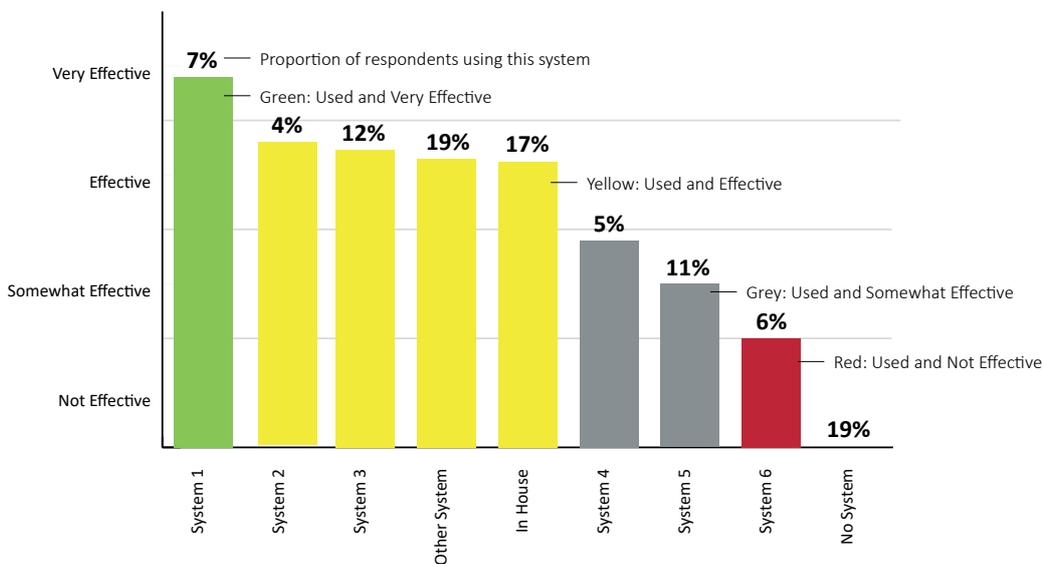
As expected there are **numerous systems** in use across the industry. Typically, as businesses become more complex — more business units, more departments, more locations, more people — there is a tendency to move to integrate the various functions of finance, project accounting, client and document management (commonly termed an Enterprise Resource Planning [ERP] System).

Typically, the smaller the business, the **less integration** occurring across the various functions of the business and more application of stand-alone systems such as Xero for accounting, Total Synergy for time entry/project accounting and MS Project for project planning.

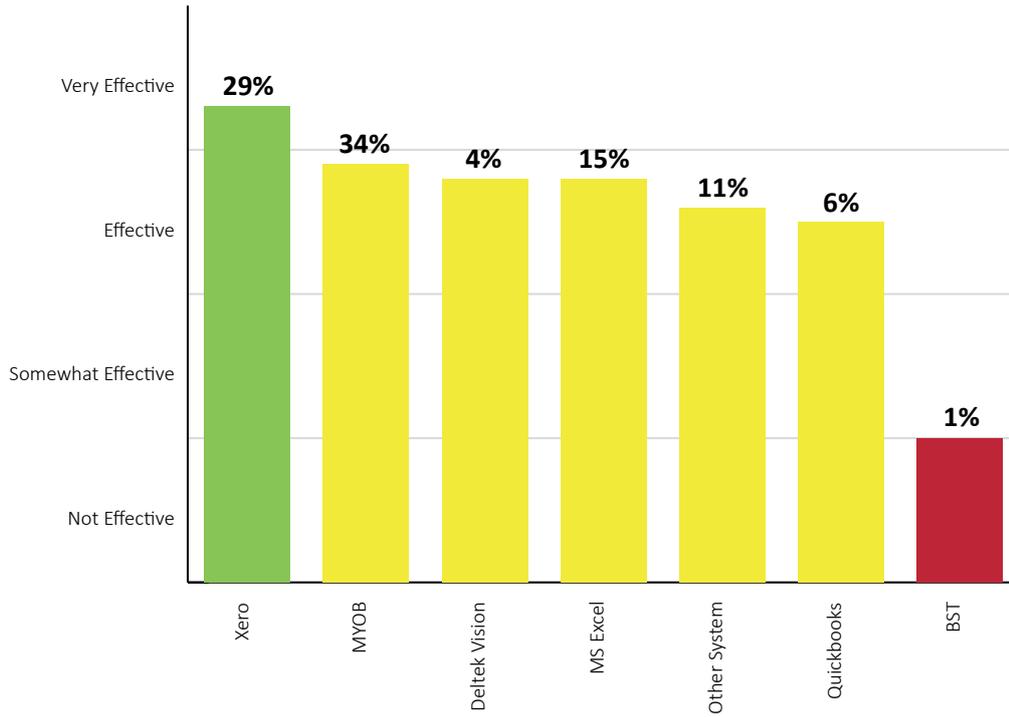
As per last year, we have summarised the results and categorised the effectiveness into the following for categories, based on a weighted average of respondent feedback.

- Used and very effective
- Used and effective
- Used and somewhat effective
- Used and Not effective

**Breakdown of Chart Information**

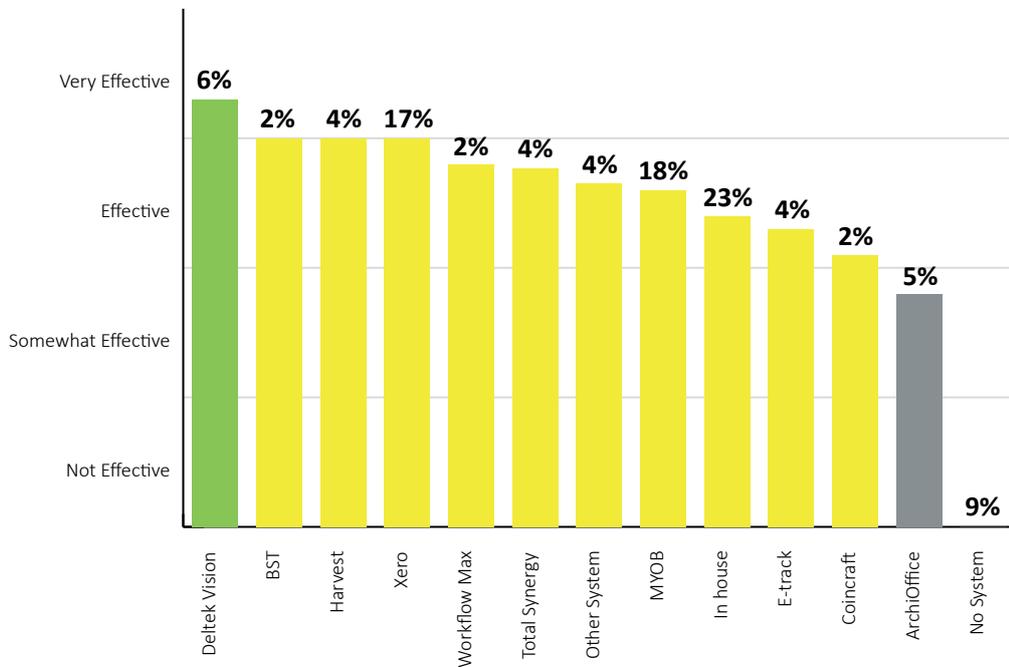


### Which accounting system do you use and how effective is it?



Other systems used included Sage, Reckon, Meridian, Netsuite, and "outsourced accountant"

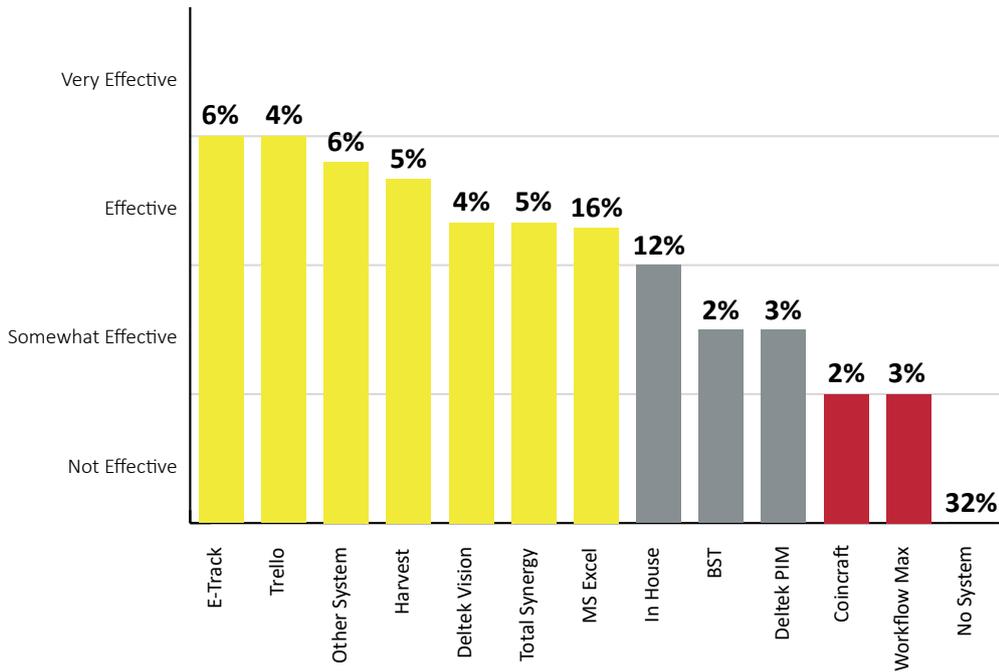
### Which time and invoicing system do you use and how effective is it?



Other systems used included Oracle, BQE, Quickbooks, Streamtime, and Netsuite

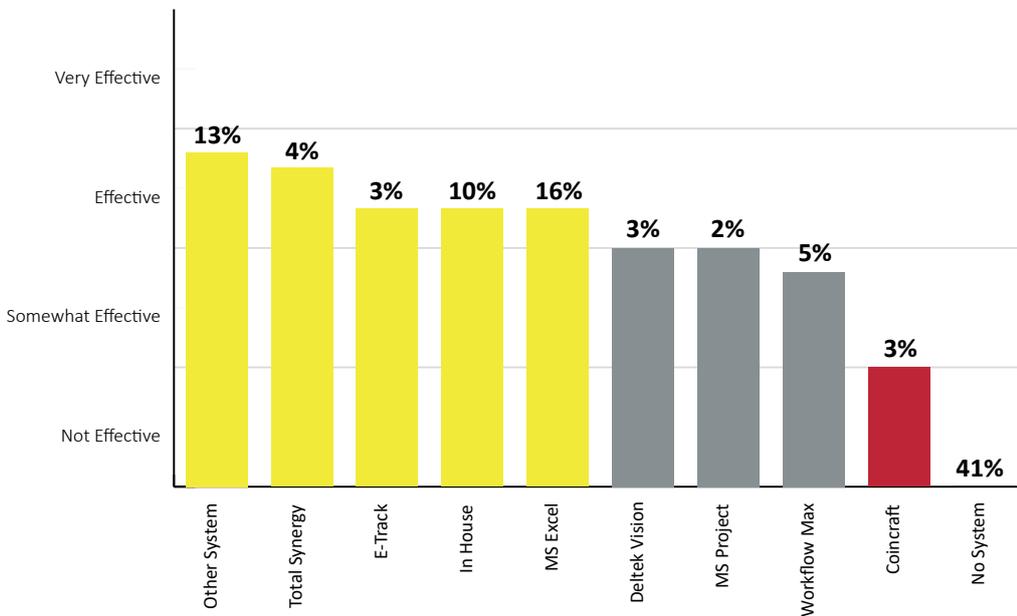


### Which project control system do you use and how effective is it?



Other systems used included Newforma, Filemaker Pro, Architects Office, and Netsuite

### Which resource management system do you use and how effective is it?



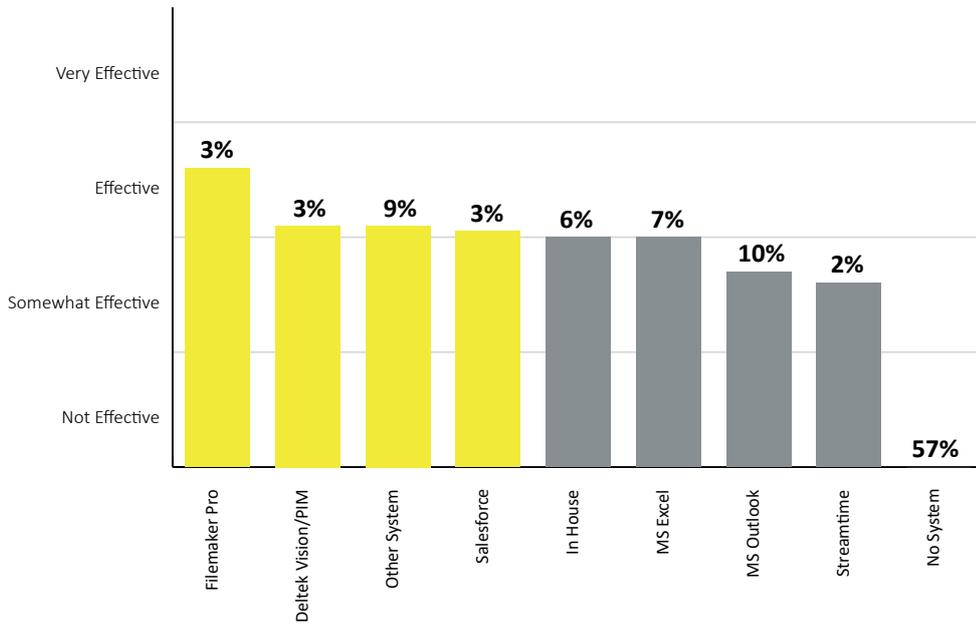
\* 62% of firms with less than 5 people do not have a resource management system in place

\* 24% of firms with more than 5 people do not have a resource management system in place

Other systems used included Architects Office, Streamtime, Basecamp, Harvest, Netsuite

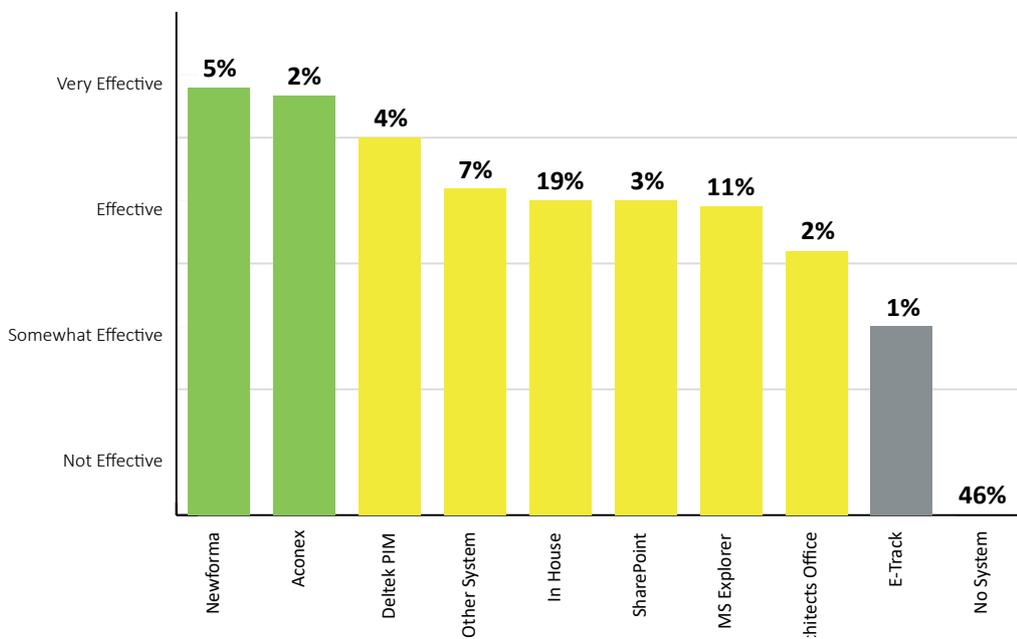


### Which contact/client management system do you use and how effective is it?



Other systems used included E-track, Sharepoint, Trello, and Apple Contacts

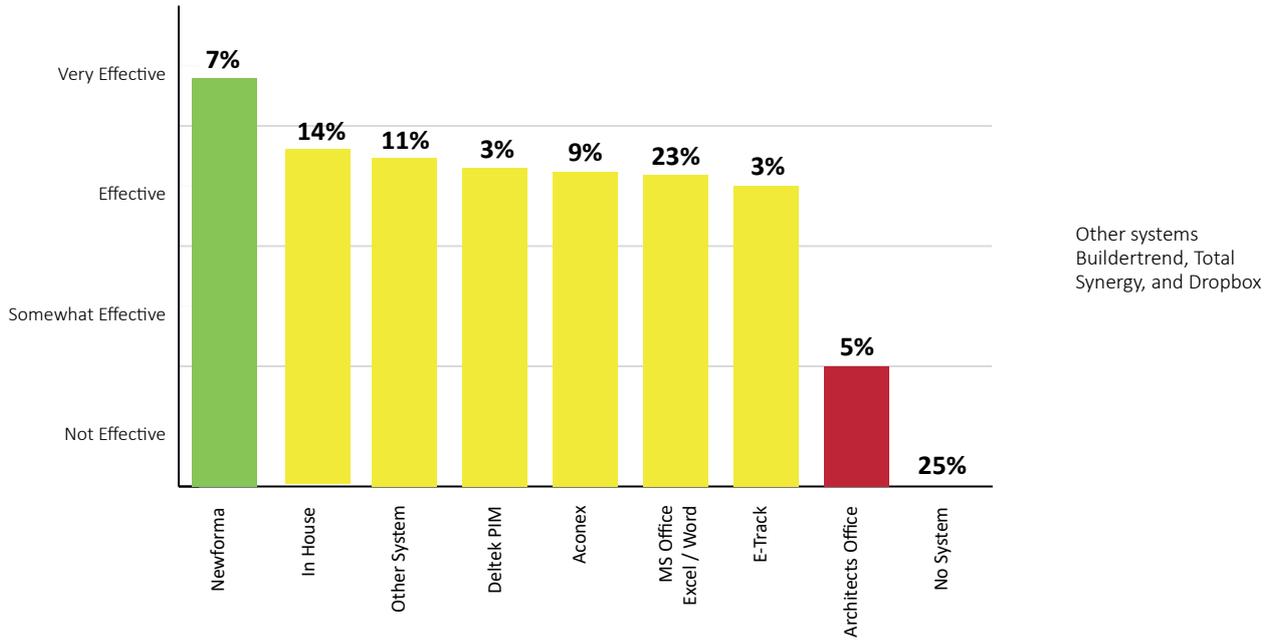
### Which document management system do you use and how effective is it?



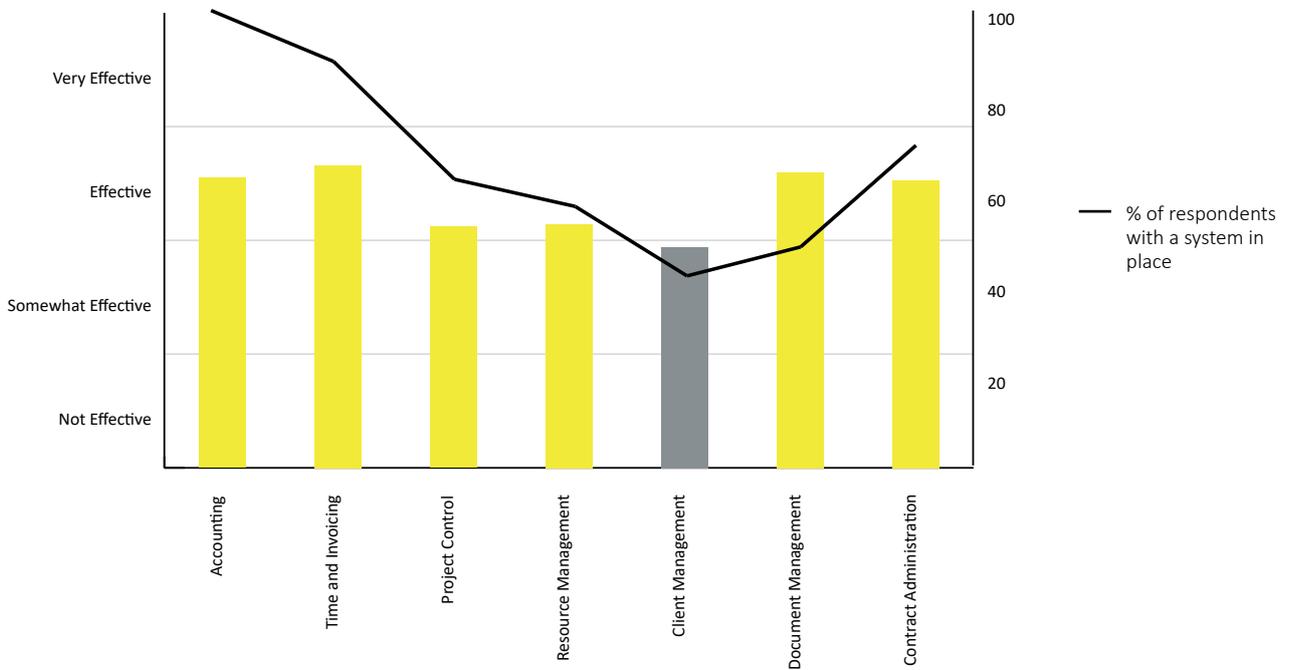
Other systems used included ArchiAdmin, Google Drive, and M-Files



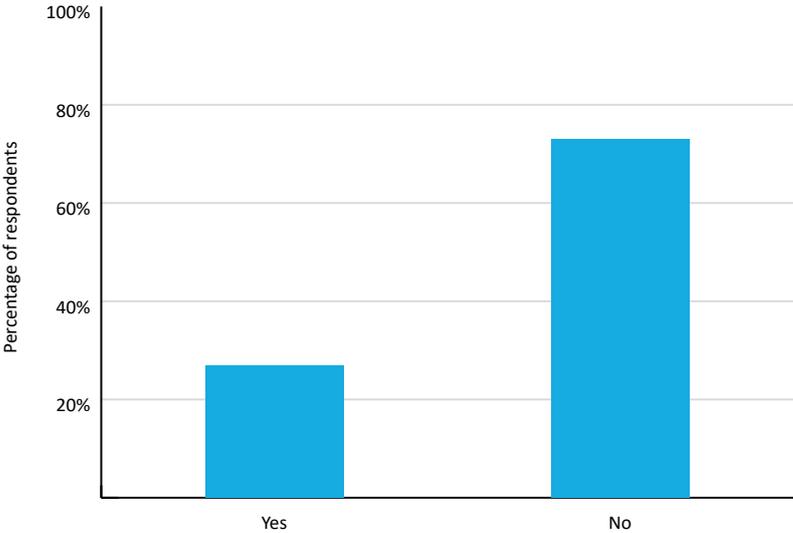
### Which contract administration system do you use and how effective is it?



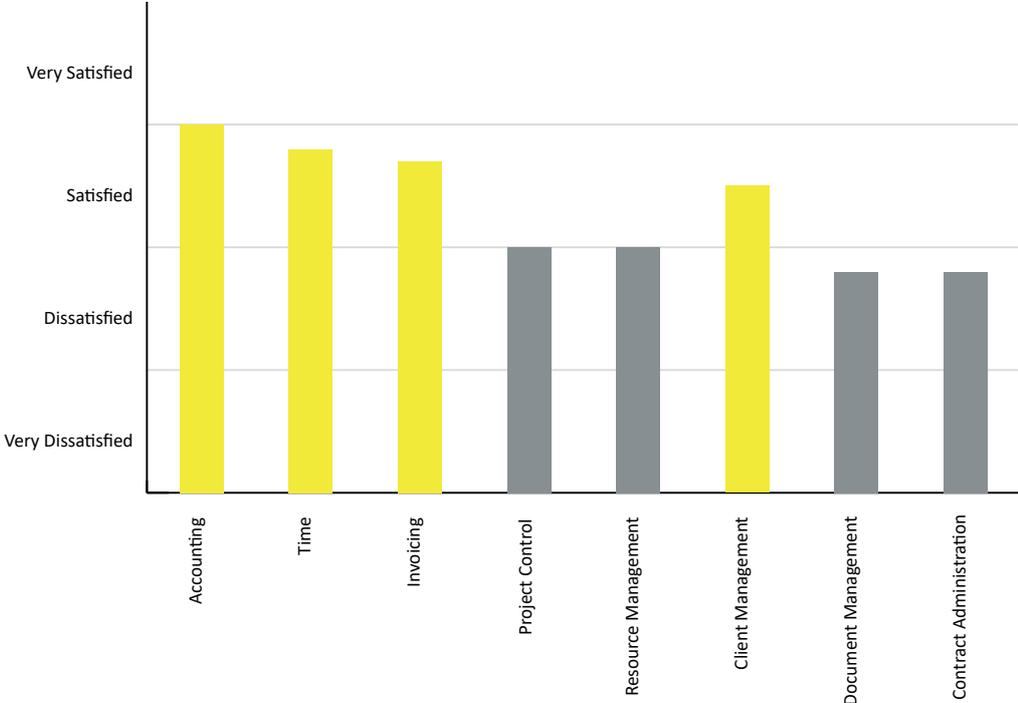
### Summary Results



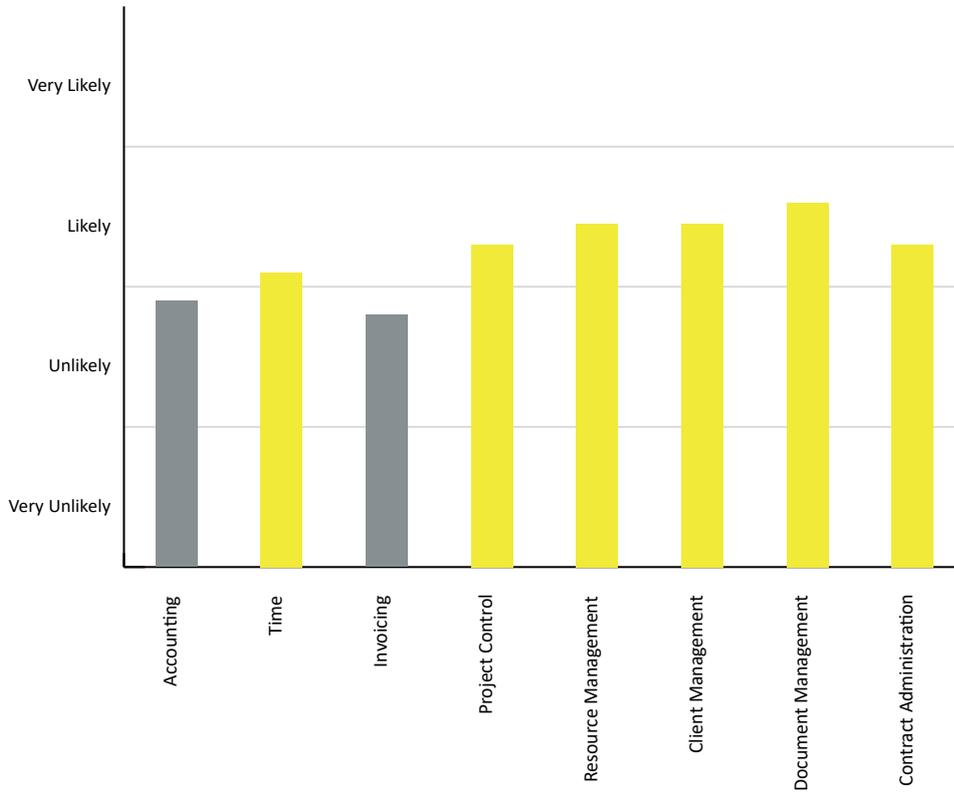
**Have you implemented a new system in the last 12 months?**



**How satisfied are you with this new system or systems?**



## What's the likelihood of you implementing a new system in the next 12 months



# Conclusions

In conclusion, the results aren't great—and there's minimal improvement from last year! Business systems are one of the key foundations of business and it is only from having effective systems that you can control and build your business.

Working with Architects, Engineers and Designers over the last 15 years and seeing first hand what works, what doesn't and why, has only reinforced our opinion that “your systems are only as effective as the behaviours that support them”. That requires leadership, education, involvement, ownership, , measurement, and follow up—and that doesn't come with a piece of software.

Think of the word 'system' as meaning a set of behaviours. It's not a piece of software, or an application. That's just the tool where information is kept and controlled. Your system is the 'way you do things' in your practice. Time and again, we've seen instances where a practice has bought software and implemented it, assuming it will bring improvements. They haven't done anything about changing the culture or business behaviours.

It's only through having strong business systems in place that will allow you to take time away from your business, knowing that everything is under control, knowing that your team of great people that you trust are following the agreed systems in your business and knowing that your team has everything in place to drive the success of the business.

# About Us

Our team can take care of your everyday business management functions, from finance and accounting to business management, technology, business systems, communications, and leadership. Our most important contribution can be assisting you with strategic business planning and change management. Refocusing your way of working means you'll spend less time micro-managing, but the key decision-making will always remain firmly in your hands.

We understand all the fundamentals that need to be in place to run an efficient and highly productive design practice. Our systems provide the critical business information you need to make informed decisions to enhance performance, improve operations and generate more business.

For managing work we have proven processes to deliver effective project management, resource planning and project costing.

We are firmly positioned around where business is heading — information anywhere/ anytime, business intelligence and out-sourcing/partnering to enable your business to focus on your area of expertise.



Management for Design provides integrated business systems and services to the design industry across Strategy, Finance, Information Technology, Human Resource Management and Business Systems.

By working with Management for Design our clients are enabled to focus on what they are great at and to control and build their businesses. For more information visit [www.m4d.com.au](http://www.m4d.com.au) or phone 03 9645 8834.