Extranet Evolution
Construction, collaboration and IT

TeamBinder builds well-integrated SaaS solution

by Paul Wilkinson

QA Software's SaaS platform TeamBinder is attractive to Australian and SE Asian construction customers for its intuitive interface and easy integration with common Microsoft tools.

Melbourne, Australia-based **QA Software** has been promoting collaboration software since the mid-1990s, building on a track record of providing local area network, LAN-based, drawing and correspondence management and materials management software to Australian construction businesses. Having developed QDMS, QTRAK and QMS, among other applications, QA was well-placed to develop a web-based solution that works well with commonly used applications in construction: the result (in 2000) was **TeamBinder**.
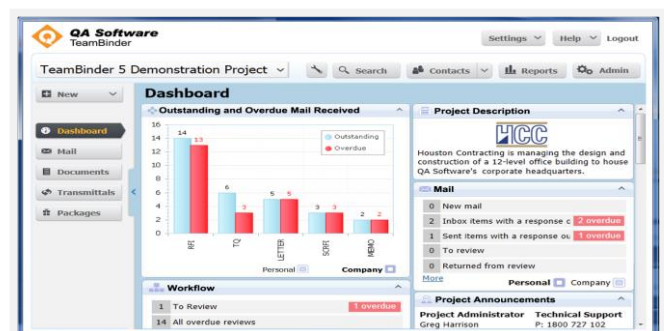
During the past 13 years, QA's TeamBinder has attracted some major customers in the increasingly competitive Australasian and southeast Asian markets, and the company now talks about transportation and construction clients such as Transport for NSW (post), MRT (Malaysia), UGL, Abigroup, MTM (Metro Trains Melbourne), Baulderstone, Bilfinger Projects, Amec and Arup. TeamBinder also has some customers in the Middle East and Africa, while its European users tend to be working on projects in TeamBinder's main markets. The application is currently available in six different language versions.

Intuitive and integrated

General manager sales and marketing Rob Bryant, account manager Ryan Campbell and CTO Yoganathan Sivaram gave me a guided tour of the latest edition of TeamBinder, on which they have worked hard to make it intuitive to use.

This is evident from the moment a user accesses the system; once logged-in, the user is presented with a dashboard view comprised of 'widgets' which can be selected and moved around to suit the user's preferences, and which summarise the latest information relevant to the user. For example, simple colour-coded bar-charts can be used to summarise how many items of different types (RFIs, letters, technical queries, etc) are outstanding and/or overdue in a user's inbox.
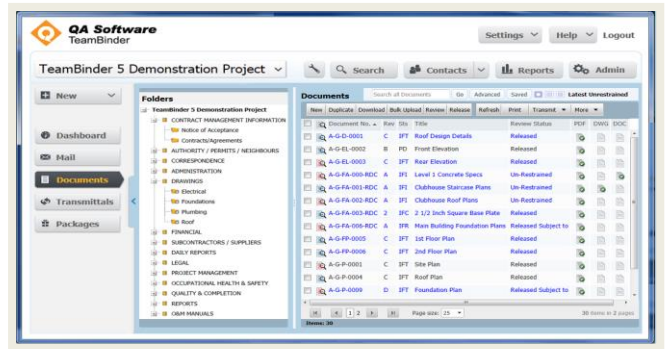

Outlook integration is something that most of the leading SaaS vendors support to some extent, but TeamBinder's latest offering is particularly strong – as you would expect of a Microsoft Gold Partner. Emails, with attachments, can be dragged and dropped onto a user's TeamBinder project, using a familiar Windows-look interface. And if the user is not in TeamBinder, emails can be created for publication to TeamBinder by clicking on a TeamBinder button in the Outlook toolbar. Ryan was particularly keen to demonstrate the advanced search tools. This not only searches emails and attachments' metadata, but also incorporates full text searching within documents and drawings.

Common user tasks within major projects, particularly during the early stages, include bulk uploads of all existing information. These can be uploaded from Word, but TeamBinder now includes an Excel upload feature. This can extract metadata attributes from the files to be uploaded, and then validate them for accuracy and completeness before upload. As you might expect, Microsoft integration also extends to strong support for Sharepoint 2010-2013

– a common requirement for corporates who use Sharepoint for internal document management. Such tools can dramatically increase productivity; I was told that one operator was able to successfully **upload 20,000 drawings in just four days** using the Excel upload function in TeamBinder.

Once populated the document register provides standard file metadata (name, status, revision, etc) for all versions of a particular item, which are displayed in a single row summarising all the formats that are available to user for a particular document (PDF, DOC, DWG, etc – user access to different file-types can also be set by the sender), as well as whether users have rights to comment, etc (BIM use is not extensive for most TeamBinder customers yet, but the system has simple tools that allow designers to publish model files from Revit, as well as conventional 2D drawings, as required). When files are distributed, the sender can also set the system so that recipients are automatically notified if and when a future revision is published.

Drawing review, mark-up and commenting is accomplished via a third party tool which also allows comparison and overlay of different revisions, the use of attachments to summarise changes that may have been made separately, and online 'chat' for collaborative review (the chat conversations are also searchable). TeamBinder reporting tools allow the easy export of well-formatted reports in Excel, PDF and Word.

On the mobile front, a TeamBinder mobile web application is available for most mobile platforms, and I understand new iPhone/iPad capability will be added later this year (2013) with Android apps to follow in early 2014.

The Australasian market

We talked a bit about TeamBinder's view of the current market. Rob agreed with other vendors that the mining and oil and gas sectors were slowing a bit; many such projects are moving from intensive construction phases into production mode, he said, and they are increasingly now supporting operation and maintenance phases for those schemes. However, he said there was still work to be won, particularly in the infrastructure sectors – where he picked out New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland as attractive markets for TeamBinder.

Over the past decade or so, most of TeamBinder's customers have opted for the software-as-a-Service option (the company also offers locally hosted options); Rob said:

"   Over 90% of our customers use the SaaS version of TeamBinder. Our self-hosted solution provides an ideal solution for some large corporates and those in more remote parts of the world. The SaaS model continues to grow in popularity with the vast majority, fuelled by the trend towards outsourcing either the entire IT infrastructure management or at least data hosting, enabling companies to reduce non-core operations and meet corporate governance standards by reducing risk.