



A CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY

# Taking the pain away with FireMate



It was early 2007, and Sai Dale sat across the table from his two best clients.

Sai was an electrician, but he wanted to expand his business. He worked primarily with property managers, who contracted a whole range of trades to help them meet their maintenance and service obligations.

The two clients across the table were his best; both commercial property managers who oversaw sizeable portfolios, and with whom he'd developed good relationships.

Sai had organised the meeting to ask them both one very simple question: "Where can I take your pain away?".

They both had the same answer: "Essential services!".

Every week, giant reports would thump down on these property managers' desks, cataloguing the endless testing and maintenance regimes required for essential services – fire safety measures such as smoke detection, extinguishers, sprinkler systems, emergency lighting and fire doors, among others.

The property managers were responsible for ensuring these essential fire safety measures met the minimum standards required by law, but keeping on top of it was turning them both grey.

"They were getting reports from these auditing companies that were just rubbish," said Sai.

**“It was 15 or 20 pages of gobbledegook with lists of ‘door, non-compliant; sprinkler system, non-compliant’. And they’d ask ‘OK, now what’? They didn’t know what they had to do with this information, and they were confused and frustrated”.**

Sai understood what they needed, and saw the opportunity he was looking for to expand into essential services.

“Straight from the word ‘go’, I kept it simple; quote, solution, price,” he said. “We’d give them a very clear report that identified any problems, gave them a solution, and told them how much it would cost, so they’d know exactly what their next step was.”

## Growing Pains

Sai’s instinct for an opportunity proved correct, and the next few years saw rapid growth for the new essential services business, Select Essential, that he established with his wife, Karen, and a business partner.

“But the problem right from the start was how to run it efficiently,” he said. “We had to make sure we were complying with all the record-keeping requirements for essential services.”

As the business started growing, that record-keeping began to get complicated. Initially, Select Essential was using an off-the-shelf database that produced printed reports.

“You’d put everything in the database and it would spit out all your paper records, and then you’d put a big fat log book on site,” explained Sai.

“Along the way, it became very apparent that this software was based on someone else’s business model, and it didn’t fit ours very well. Our business model was about covering all the essential services bases for our clients and giving them very easy to use reports, and this database just didn’t do that.”

So, faced with what they saw as a unique requirement, Select Essential built their own software to fit. They approached some software developers, and created a heavily-customised system based on the FileMaker database application.

Once it was built, the new system – dubbed ESM Manager – did exactly what Select Essential wanted it to do. Unlike the old system, it was built to fit their business model, and the specific workflows of a fire protection company.

“If I had some feature on my wish list, I’d speak to our developers and get it done,” said Sai. “And obviously you’d pay for it, and it would take a little while to make that happen.”

ESM Manager was a big improvement on the old database, but as Select Essential continued to grow and the services offered to clients matured and evolved, so too did the demands on the software.



### A comprehensive solution was needed

There were also some things it just couldn't be made to do. While ESM Manager was handling compliance documentation, job scheduling was still managed with a separate system.

"The business kept growing and my wish list kept getting bigger and bigger," Sai explained.

"At some point, I just had to admit it was getting too hard. Our developers were trying to catch up and meet our demands, but we were spending too much of our time trying to manage this software, rather than meeting clients' needs."

It was time to see what else was available on the market.

### Shopping for the wish list

So, where to start? There are numerous software packages on the market that promise to help businesses manage their documentation, their job scheduling or their stock keeping.

But the reason why Select Essential developed their own software in the first place remained; nothing on the market at the time fit the fire protection business model. When they first went looking, every software package they found had been developed with different businesses in mind.

That changed when Sai met Rob Thomas, the founder of a company called FireMate.

Rob had been working in the fire protection industry since he was a teenager. Starting as an electrical apprentice with a small business in Canberra, he eventually worked his way up to CEO of what had grown into Australia's third-largest fire protection company.



## By the industry, for the industry

Along the way, he had gone through a journey very reminiscent of Sai's, running into a dearth of software designed for fire protection businesses. Rob's path forked, however, when he turned that need into an opportunity with the establishment of FireMate.

FireMate was the culmination of Rob's decades of experience within the fire protection industry; fire specific software designed to deliver automatic compliance reports, asset management, invoicing and defect quoting through industry-based workflows and processes.

"I had a call with Rob, and he started running me through FireMate and what it could do," said Sai. "I went into that call with my wish list of features in my head, and as he kept talking I was ticking off more and more things off my list. It just ticked off my wish list no end, and it was like – 'oh my god, here is it, off the shelf.'"

"Straight away I could see that FireMate came from our world. It wasn't someone coming in from outside saying 'sure, our software can do your firey maintenance stuff', it had obviously been built by someone with the same mindset as us."

The decision was clear, and Select Essential began the process of migrating to FireMate.



## Life as an émigré

If you think changing from Android to iPhone is a headache, that's got nothing on the potential nightmare shifting your business from one database to another can be. Lost records, data reformatting, new admin processes, delays and upset customers are just a few of the potential pitfalls.

The big question, of course, is whether you can bring your data across to the new system.

"Obviously, we wanted to bring all of our luggage across," said Sai. "We had to talk about what we were going to bring across and what we wanted to leave behind."

Much of that 'luggage' required a clean-up – tidying up old data, or reformatting it to import cleanly into the new system.

"We had a lot of help from the FireMate team, and also I knew how it all worked, because the data was coming from a system that we'd built ourselves," explained Sai.

"In the end it went very well. But it took a while, and we had to learn new things – it was like learning to ride a new bike, one with a lot more bells and whistles."

FireMate provided training wheels until the Select Essential team had the hang of it. One of FireMate's support team flew down to Melbourne and stayed in a nearby hotel to train the Select Essential team on the new system.

FireMate has since brought on board Melbourne-based support staff, who regularly visit the Select Essential office to run training sessions and introduce new features.

Since starting the migration in 2019 and going live on FireMate in 2020, Select Essential has learned one of the other major benefits of working with a software-as-a-service provider like FireMate.

"There's new features being added all the time," said Sai. "We suggest a feature to the support team, and they say, 'that's a good idea' and add it to their list. We also get to benefit from all the good ideas other FireMate users have."



## Back in the right chair

In the two years since going live with FireMate, Select Essential have come to grips with what the new system can do for them.

FireMate hasn't just replaced Select Essential's custom asset management database, but also their old job scheduling system, as well as integrating more tightly with their accounting software.

"The more efficient workflows have just started to really add up to a better business model for us," said Sai.

The time saved from the new system has freed up the admin staff as well as the techs out in the field allowing them the capacity to take on new projects and new clients.

As for Sai; he's not spending time at his desk fixing bugs in custom software any more. He's back in his old chair now, sitting across from his clients, asking how he can take their pain away.



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