



A New Era for Spotlight Sports Group: HRIS Consultancy Drives HR Transformation

How expert HRIS consultancy helped SSG implement an HRIS to support their dynamic global operations

From Challenges to Solutions: Why Spotlight Sports Group Needed a New HR System



Spotlight Sports Group Limited (SSG) has its roots in the Racing Post, a horse racing and sports betting daily newspaper founded in 1986. Since then, the company has transformed into a global digital content technology business, providing cutting-edge platforms and content to the betting industry. SSG collaborates with the world's largest betting operators, embedding premium content, marketing, and affiliate partnerships into their platforms.

SSG's workforce consists of 440 employees, with the majority based in the United Kingdom. The company also employs a small number of staff in the United States, Ireland, Australia, and France. Approximately 170 of SSG's employees are unionised under collective agreements. There are also a small number of workers employed via an Employer of Record who are based in Asia. In addition, there is a large off payroll contingent workforce and approximately 50 of these have contracts managed by HR, with the rest managed directly by the resourcing team. A creative team of over 100 staff works variable shift patterns across the business.

A unique aspect of their operations is the inclusion of ICS-digital (ICS), a specialist agency within the group. ICS, employing 120 people, focuses on SEO, digital marketing, and translation services for major bookmakers, iGaming brands, and sports betting platforms. Operating as a separate business entity, ICS maintains its own brand and employment policies, although these are largely aligned with those of the wider organisation.

The diverse and distributed nature of SSG's workforce and the complexity of managing multiple entities highlighted the need for a more efficient HR solution. To address this, SSG initiated a search for a new HRIS system that would streamline HR processes across the employee lifecycle while supporting their dynamic and global workforce.

In 2022, SSG implemented a new HR platform to replace its previous system, which had been in place for several years. However, after only two years, it became clear that the system was not delivering the intended benefits. Despite the effort and resources invested in this recent implementation, the system failed to meet the business's needs, and SSG's management team decided to find a more appropriate solution.

The objective was to implement a single integrated platform to support all HR processes across the employee lifecycle. However, SSG was open to considering HRIS systems that could integrate with the existing Workable ATS platform, ensuring a seamless connection between recruitment and HR processes. Given the challenges and dissatisfaction with previous systems, SSG needed to select a long-term solution to enhance employee and manager experience and improve efficiencies in HR operations. The system had to be engaging, intuitive, and capable of addressing the evolving needs of the business while supporting its diverse workforce across multiple entities.

The Client

SSG's Search for a Smarter HR Solution

In early 2024, Spotlight Sports Group (SSG) reached out to Tugela People with a clear objective: to replace their existing HRIS and implement a new system that would better meet their needs. Katie Jones, People Director at SSG, explained their requirements in an enquiry through the Tugela People website, writing:

“ We are looking to replace our current HRIS and require support in selecting and implementing a new system. We have around 500 employees who are mainly UK-based, but we have a small number based in the US, Ireland, and Australia.

The Brief

In March 2024, following initial discussions to understand SSG's business and requirements, Tugela People introduced John Brownhill, an independent HRIS consultant and owner of People & Technologies, to lead the project. John, who partners with Tugela People for HRIS consulting services, was brought in at the beginning of the project to lead the entire process, ensuring SSG's objectives were met efficiently. With his expertise in HRIS selection and implementation, John guided SSG through the entire journey, from assessing business needs to executing a smooth transition.

Having changed systems in the past, it was vital for SSG to make the right decision that would be well received by the business. Payroll was excluded from the scope, allowing SSG to focus on critical HR functions such as onboarding, HR administration, leave management, compensation management, employee and manager self-service, and reporting and dashboards.

The first phase of the project involved conducting a thorough business process review to assess current workflows and define the ideal future state for HR processes. This review helped to refine functional requirements and provide clarity on what the new system needed to deliver.

In April 2024, suppliers were invited to submit high-level proposals based on these prioritised specifications. Three suppliers were then asked to present their solutions against eight critical scenarios, which were essential for the project's success. After careful evaluation, each supplier was scored, and a preferred vendor was selected. Following detailed due diligence and contract negotiations, the chosen system was selected for its functional fit, ease of use, and value for money. Additionally, it was recognised that the new system could also replace Meta's Workplace communication platform, which was being decommissioned.

The implementation project officially began in July 2024, with a month of preparation to map out the processes and provide essential training to the People team. A key challenge during this stage was ensuring that ICS, a division within SSG, could operate as an independent entity with its own business requirements. The flexibility of the chosen solution allowed the People team to configure the system to meet these unique needs.

A hand is pointing towards a futuristic digital interface. The interface features three circular icons: a magnifying glass over a person silhouette, the letters 'HR' in a bold font, and a group of three people silhouettes. The background is dark with glowing blue lines and dots, suggesting a high-tech or data-driven environment.

The system went live in October 2024 and was positively received across the business. SSG now has a fully integrated HRIS that supports their global workforce and enhances HR processes, driving greater efficiency and providing a better user experience for employees and managers alike.



“ The Insiders Perspective



Katie Jones, People Director at SSG, played a pivotal role as the project sponsor throughout the HRIS implementation.

As part of our case study, we interviewed Katie to gain insight into her perspective on the various elements of the project.

From the initial selection process to the successful go-live, Katie shared valuable insights into the challenges, decisions, and outcomes that shaped the journey. Here's what she had to say about the experience.



What challenges were you facing with your existing HR system?

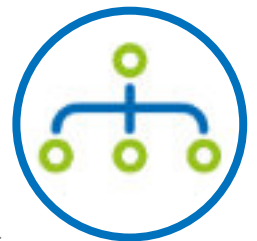
Honestly? It just didn't work.

The company switched to a new HR system in 2022, but the integration didn't go as planned. It all happened before I joined, and before most of the current team came on board, so none of us were involved in the initial setup. Unfortunately, the data migration wasn't handled correctly from the start, which led to ongoing issues. Reports didn't pull the correct information, and when they did, they weren't in a user-friendly format.

We spent 18 months trying to fix a simple sickness tracking workflow, but it was never fully resolved. Over time, it became clear that the system wasn't fit for purpose. Because of these challenges, people lost trust in it, and adoption was low. Some employees logged their holidays, but even that wasn't reliable. It worked for some teams but not for those on shift patterns, who still had to use spreadsheets.

Payroll faced similar issues, with key data being stored separately because we couldn't rely on the system's accuracy. Ultimately, it became more of a digital filing cabinet than a functional HR tool, adding inefficiencies instead of reducing them. It was clear we needed a better solution.

What Were the Key Criteria for Your New HR System?



First and foremost, it had to be **simple and visually appealing**. Our previous systems were clunky and unintuitive, so we wanted a system that looked and felt totally different and was easy to navigate.

Secondly, **reporting had to be effortless**. We needed a system that could pull accurate data quickly, without requiring endless manipulation. In the past, reporting had been a real pain point, so having a reliable, straightforward solution was non-negotiable.

Thirdly, one of our biggest challenges was that **Spotlight Sports Group owns another business, ICS, which operates separately on a day-to-day basis**. While we needed all our data in one place for board reporting, the two businesses run differently, with separate people teams managing their own operations. We needed a system that could support both entities under one account while allowing for flexibility in workflows, so each business could operate in the way that suited them best.

Branding and workflows were also significant considerations. The two businesses have distinct branding and operational structures, so we needed a system that could accommodate both while ensuring everything worked seamlessly. While we tried to streamline processes where possible, there were instances where each business required different workflows. The system's ability to be flexible and configure workflows to meet the unique requirements of each business was essential.

Ultimately, we needed an HR system that was simple, reliable, and adaptable. A solution that would work for the whole business, rather than create more work for us.

Why did you seek the support of an expert HRIS consultant?

We knew we needed consultancy support because the team didn't have the expertise.

As a director of the business, I've been involved in operations, but I'm not a systems expert. I've participated in system changes before, but always as a stakeholder, not the one responsible for the project. I've never been hands-on in terms

of design, functionality checks, or project execution, and that was the case for the entire team.

Given the experience with our last system, I didn't want us to make the same mistakes again. We needed someone we could trust to help set up the system properly from the start. It was essential to have an independent view and someone who could challenge us on what we did or didn't need. Sometimes, you don't know what questions to ask, and having someone probe the right areas was incredibly valuable. Thankfully, it turned out to be exactly what we needed.

Why did you decide to partner with Tugela People?

When choosing a consultancy, I looked at several companies, some of which I was already connected with, but not Tugela People. I came across their profile online, and it really impressed me, so I reached out via their website. Thomas Schilling, the CEO and Founder of Tugela People, responded promptly, even while on holiday, which showed a real commitment to our needs. He had a strong understanding of our situation and came across as highly knowledgeable, which gave me a great deal of confidence. He then quickly connected me with John Brownhill, an independent HRIS consultant who works closely with Tugela People, and I felt he would be an excellent fit for us.

I spoke to a few other companies, but ultimately, I felt the most confident with Tugela People. They offered the perfect balance of expertise and cost—it just felt right. Some of the other companies were more affordable, but I wasn't convinced about

their depth of knowledge. They handled systems, but it was just one part of their business, not something they were fully immersed in every day.

Another company had the right expertise but took a very structured, one-size-fits-all approach, which didn't sit well with me. They had a fixed process, regardless of our specific needs. In contrast, Tugela People's approach was much more flexible. They allowed us to choose how involved we wanted them to be at different stages and were open to adjusting the plan if needed.

Ultimately, the combination of expertise, flexibility, and cost made the decision easy, and it felt like working with Tugela People was the perfect fit for us.



What Guided Your System Selection?

When choosing the right HRIS system, we reviewed at least three or four different options. Our consultant, with his extensive experience in the field, did a great deal of the initial legwork on our behalf, given his familiarity with a wide range of systems. We started by defining our criteria and using a spreadsheet to prioritise everything, from budget considerations to specific functionalities.

The demos we attended were invaluable, and we got a good sense of how each system might fit into our workflow. However, some demos didn't impress us! One system, although fairly good in functionality, was quickly discounted due to a poor demo experience and concerns about the team behind it, which made us hesitant to proceed.

We then compared Sage People with HiBob. Sage People had strengths, particularly in payroll and dual branding. However, HiBob stood out for its modern, user-friendly interface. It was refreshing compared to the older system we'd been using, and it offered additional features, like the ability to integrate business communications into the system. This was a huge bonus since we had been using a

separate platform for internal communications, and HiBob's features allowed us to eliminate that extra system, saving costs.

While we did have some challenges, especially when dealing with multiple entities and the system defaulting to 'all company' for comms, overall, HiBob proved to be a great fit. Its design, flexibility, and ability to streamline our communications made the choice clear. The system's user experience has already been a hit with our employees, and we're confident it's the right choice moving forward.

Our consultant played a key role in narrowing down our choices, eliminating systems that didn't quite meet our needs, saving us time in the process.

We also found a solution for one of the key limitations we identified during the selection process, dual branding. Although HiBob doesn't natively support it, we knew this going in and developed a workaround that worked for us. By blending the colours of our two existing brands, we created a joint identity that provides a cohesive look on the

homepage. While the main interface remains the same for all users, we've customised system-generated documents, such as letters, to reflect the correct branding for each entity. This approach ensures a seamless experience for employees while still preserving the distinct identities of both parts of the business.



How Quickly Did the Transition Happen?

The journey from selecting a consultant to being fully up and running with a new HRIS was surprisingly seamless. After our initial conversation in March 2024, we moved through the entire process of appointing Tugela People, selecting a system, implementing it, and successfully switching off our old system by November of the same year!

Having a clear deadline helped keep us focused. Our previous system was reaching the end of the contract, and we didn't want to continue paying for something that wasn't meeting our needs. We aimed to go live in October, ensuring a smooth transition before deactivating the old system. By November, we had fully switched over, avoiding unnecessary costs while ensuring business continuity.

How Has Employee Adoption and Engagement Been with the New System?

With just under 450 employees across both companies, we were pleased to see the new system quickly gaining traction. Initially, there was some natural hesitation due to the challenges we'd faced with previous systems, but once employees saw the benefits, like easily logging holidays, the system started to become a key part of their daily routine.

We took a thoughtful approach during the launch, opting for a soft rollout to avoid overwhelming everyone. We made sure to communicate clearly without overhyping so employees felt confident in using the new system. To encourage engagement, we ran a competition where employees who logged in within a certain timeframe could enter a prize draw for vouchers. The response was fantastic, with many employees embracing the system right away.

Although we're still exploring all the features, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Employees are actively using the system without prompting, and we're seeing increased engagement across the board. We're excited about the progress and confident that, as we continue to roll out more features, the system will become even more integral to our operations.



What advice would you give others tasked with selecting a new HR system?

My key advice would be to be clear on what's essential and what's not. At the start, we probably overemphasised some features that seemed important but weren't as crucial as we initially thought. Working with a consultant can help narrow down your focus, ensuring you prioritise what truly matters. It's easy to get caught up in the "nice-to-haves" that don't always align with what you truly need.

Another piece of advice would be to trust the consultant's expertise. I know some people can find it hard to let go of the decision-making process, but sometimes it's best to rely on the advice of someone with deep knowledge of the systems and who can guide you effectively. We trusted John's recommendations, and it saved us a great deal of time and effort that would've been wasted if we'd second-guessed every step.

Contact Us

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