



contra

**'We thought we'd never find a system that could do it all.
But then we found Accelo:'**

Success at Contra Agency with One Integrated System

What's it like to run a digital agency? It's complex, chaotic and increasingly tied into the evolution of video. However, this hasn't always been the case.

Back in 2000, when Roberto Ciarleglio co-founded Contra, things looked a little different. Newspapers, email, and even radio were the go-to mediums for content marketing and video was confined only to the walls of broadcast television. But that didn't stop Roberto and his co-founders, who could sense that video would become a critical part of the digital landscape. He launched Contra, a multi platform digital agency run out of London, that still today - 17 years later - is one of the industry leaders in video production.

"At Contra, we do everything from video and film production, to web design and development, web app development, animations, graphic design, and the rest. So as you can imagine it's a very hectic environment."

Starting a bit early and from humble beginnings, Roberto's company has grown into an international brand - taking on big-name clients like Red Bull, Honda and BBC, just to name a few. But while this brought with it greater brand exposure, it also meant more work for Roberto and his team. On any given day, they were trying to juggle multiple projects of higher value and profile with their growing team, all while trying to maintain their reputation with an exceptional level of service.

Running out of steam with multiple tools

Roberto says that trying to manage high-ticket contracts, track billable time, and run a profitable agency using multiple tools and free apps was near impossible. "Think about all the different resources - people, time, money, products - that you need to create a film, or a website, or any digital campaign for that matter, from scratch. How are you supposed to manage all of that successfully with separate systems? You can't," he said.

Challenge:

Contra was trying to work efficiently with a catastrophic collection of five cumbersome tools. As a result, they were wasting resources in places where technology was failing them and losing time that should have been spent with clients who bring in revenue.

Solution:

Contra's co-founder, Roberto Ciarleglio, realized he could unite his sales, projects, client communication, support tickets and retainers in one place, which saved his team from hours of busywork jumping between separate tools just to find the right information.

Results:

Contra have dramatically increased their billable hours per week since switching to Accelo. Roberto says his team are 25 per cent more productive and he in particular has far more visibility into his team schedules, client relationships, and business operations.



"Accelo has given me more visibility into my operations, and nothing ever gets lost."

Roberto Ciarleglio
Co-Founder, Managing Director
Contra

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"What we needed was a system that could manage all of our service based projects - from opportunities, to project management, to timesheets, invoicing, support requests, and ongoing contracts," explained Roberto. Unfortunately, Contra were running with a mess of different, disconnected tools, including more than 5 different platforms for tracking their work. "We were using a standalone CRM, along with Basecamp that we only used for tracking time, Trello for web developers, and one other project management tool just for filmmakers. Those systems couldn't integrate directly with our accounting software, Quickbooks Online, so we'd then have to manually copy and paste our time reports over to that system. It was very disjointed," said Roberto. "We were facing a fragmented future that was holding the business back."

In 2016, Roberto began to look for one integrated system that could manage all of his agencies service based work - "because tracking time and costs on separate systems wasn't going to last," he said. "We knew there were systems out there that could do parts of this well, but not all of it. Then we heard about Accelo."

Finding a system to do it all

One of the first features to catch Roberto's eye was Accelo's automatic time tracking.

The ability to effortlessly track all of Contra's billable work was something he'd dreamed of, but thought could only be achieved with yet another project management tool that still required manual effort. "But with Accelo, we can record time automatically, and that makes life so much easier. It also means we can bill for more work and get better insight into the work that's already been done. When we start an activity, the time is automatically recorded and when we send an email, that's recorded too - so we don't have to try and remember to log this work at the end of the day," said Roberto, and that alone has increased the number of billable hours logged at Contra each week by 15 percent - money that goes straight to the bottom line.

Being able to record time against support tickets was another huge bonus for Roberto, especially due to the nature of his client-focused work. Now when his staff respond to client issues or work remotely with them on projects, all the time spent doing so is being tracked automatically and can easily be converted into revenue. This gives Roberto a real-time handle on staff utilization and shows him how much they are contributing to Contra's overall bottom line. He says, "Accelo has given me more visibility into my operations, and nothing ever gets lost."

Bringing multiple systems together into one place, combined with making time tracking easy and automated, has saved every team member at Contra more than a dozen hours a week!

Roberto says they've "also increased productivity as a whole by around 25 percent because [his team] aren't wasting time on manual work." This is valuable time that can now be spent with clients, whose high value business Roberto wants to retain.

Retaining clients for lasting growth

"I remember looking at Accelo for the first time and thinking 'yes this can solve our disconnect.' Before Accelo, if a client wanted to make a request or had a problem, they would have to email us directly, then we'd have to manually create a task for that issue, then make a timesheet entry - which was always just an estimate - and then we'd have to copy all of this data into our project management tool. Now with Accelo, clients email us and get a nice, automated 'thank you' reply. A ticket is created with a click, and that can then be assigned to an account manager or developer. From there, all the work associated with that ticket is logged in real-time - again so nothing gets lost," said Roberto.

This dramatically reduced the amount of pertinent information that Contra was losing to inefficient communication processes. When emails got lost, he'd have to go digging through endless Cc and Bcc threads just to get the information he needed, or even worse, rehash old information with his client. With Accelo, all client communication is stored in one place for him to access at any time, and Roberto believes this has been instrumental in his success: "Because of our line of work, we're always jumping between different tasks and trying to answer several issues at once, so we needed the transparency of Accelo to do this both effectively and successfully. Now that we have everything connected, there are far fewer opportunities that get lost among the clutter. The ability to have retainer management for clients has obviously helped us grow, but we're also able to stay on budget thanks to the increased transparency. We can forecast, plan, and resource better than ever before, and we're more aware of the potential revenue that's within reach," said Roberto.