Tobermore

Enterprise Resource Planning

Region
Northern Ireland

Sector
Manufacturing

PROJECT BACKGROUND

Tobermore Concrete products is one of Ireland's leading manufacturers of rectangular and interlocking paving blocks for the landscape and building sectors. It has been in business for 65 years and has 220 employees. The company owes its name to the location of its head office in Northern Ireland and it has five more satellite offices in Bangor, Dublin, Galway, Cork and Leyland in the UK. All of its concrete products are manufactured and distributed from head office.

THE SITUATION

Some companies instantly see the benefits of technology, but having got its fingers burned with another accounts software upgrade in the recent past, Tobermore needed a lot of persuading. "We made the change in the expectation that it would be no worse than we already had," relates Glenn Robinson, general manager of Tobermore Concrete.

"It was a nightmare. There were lots of problems, it didn't do what we wanted and there was significant downtime every day. There was poor support, implementation and training. If you want a case study of how not to do something, that was it. We worked and tried to get it to deliver benefits, but the product just couldn't stand up to it."

According to Robinson, the company wanted a system that could handle the growing volume of orders Tobermore received, while making it easy for staff to input these orders immediately.

"We wanted to enhance the customer experience and make the whole order processing aspect of doing business with Tobermore much slicker. We also needed reliability and a product that would support our long-term growth with a company behind it to provide the necessary support."

SOLUTION

Needing technology but unwilling to continue with its current software, Tobermore began shopping around for a new solution in May 2006. It looked at several options and whittled the list down to two bidders – Sysco Software Solutions, which proposed Microsoft Dynamics NAV, along with a rival reseller pitching a different product.

"We made it clear that we were going to be a very difficult customer based on the negative experience that we had," says Robinson. "But we said, if your company can deliver, there's a very lucrative order on the table. Sysco really stepped up to the mark. By the end of the presentation to the team at Tobermore, they were streets ahead of the competition. They were able to draw a prototype in a day of how they could meet our needs. Ultimately, that swung it."

Tobermore decided on Microsoft Dynamics NAV at the end of August and the system went live on 4 January 2007. "It was a very tight implementation because of the scale and the number of different processes that each department has," says Robinson. "They key thing from the outset was a good project plan to work towards. We set out a series of dates and times and key performance indicators that by certain dates had to be implemented."

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Sysco delivered against all of those requirements and Microsoft Dynamics NAV now runs all of Tobermore's core business functions, including stock control, order processing, financial and purchasing.

The software had much of the functionality Tobermore needed out of the box, but over the course of the project the company has looked to modify the package to suit its business processes and make the customer ordering process easier. Sysco delivered staff training in November and December. The company currently has 65 Microsoft Dynamics NAV users spread across its six offices.

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BENEFITS – PRODUCTIVITY AND BETTER BUSINESS PROCESSES

Ease of use

"From previously only having a small number of people who could enter orders, now everyone on

the sales team can do it and check the schedule. The benefits from an administration point of view have been tenfold," says Robinson. Moreover, the product is easy to administer – users only get the menus and options they need.

Flexibility

Microsoft Dynamics NAV has proven to be extremely adaptable to suit the requirements of the business, Robinson states. "Whenever the staff saw the flexibility in the product, they were saying: 'can you do this or that'. They realised, suddenly they had a product where they could ask for a change and it would happen and would improve their job."

That snowball effect has meant employees have been able to suggest improvements to make the business process more efficient, which have been incorporated into Dynamics NAV.

"Our staff never had everything like this before. It was a breath of fresh air," Robinson declares.

Improved business efficiency

Using the software has allowed Tobermore to take many of the manual processes out of its business and improve customer service at the same time. In addition, the same data in head office can be accessed by staff in real time in any of the company's branches.

"The operation was phenomenally driven by paper. But if we got a call from a customer in Cork, we had to check that order. If that bit of paper gets lost, it was difficult to trace down. Now, orders taken over the phone are inputted directly into Dynamics NAV. I can look at orders on the system and track their progress. Previously all the other satellite offices had to ring in – now they can do that by going on to the system."

Greater productivity

"Obviously, it's spreading the workload and in terms of staff perception, it's a lot more reliable than what they were used to," says Robinson. "In the space of the first few months of running the product, confidence is very high and everyone says we made the right decision."

Faster business decisions

Timely availability of data through Dynamics NAV has eased the burden on management and staff, helping them to become more efficient. "We set out a number of different reports we wanted. It's just so easy to use. I can check current order status and it's so comfortable and easy to navigate around," Robinson says. "Ultimately, I would not wind back the clock to take back what we had in the past. You have a lot of live information, it's not processing data

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at the end of the day. That makes it easier for people to make decisions for customers. The speed of information is much more beneficial. We're no longer working a day behind."

Reduced need for IT support

"We tend to do a lot more things via email. Previously, we'd have been on the phone every day to the IT support company. We save a lot of time and people waiting on the system to do things. You can't put a figure on that."

Technology aligned with company strategy

Tobermore is in a significant growth phase in the business. From a sales and despatch point of view, customers need to get products as soon as possible. Because Microsoft Dynamics NAV has made the company more efficient, Tobermore hasn't needed to recruit additional staff to handle the extra volume of sales.

SUMMARY

Applying the right technology to your business can boost efficiency and productivity and it's money well spent. "I would say it's a huge investment for us. In terms of improvement of efficiency to the business and staff, it will pay for itself within two to three years," Robinson says. "From a business point of view it's really aligned our software plans within the business. Now we've got a good product that gives us the confidence to build on that we haven't had before.

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