

Case Study: James Fleming & Co

Case Study

Dynamics AX system easily handles substantial turnover growth for James Fleming & Co

Overview

Customer: James Fleming & Co manufactures specialist products primarily for the bakery, pastry and confectionery industries. The company's Flemings and Mather's, brands are renowned nationally for quality and excellence. Flemings specialises in fondants, inverts, caramel and jellies, while Mather's is renowned for jams, mincemeat, pie fillings and curds.

Situation

Flemings needed to find a replacement for its Multisoft system after Sage purchased Multisoft and announced it was ceasing Multisoft system support.

Solution

Following consultation with its global Group IT function, Flemings selected Microsoft Dynamics AX from IntegrYS. IntegrYS Solutions' in-depth manufacturing industry expertise and the long-term Microsoft road map for AX were key factors.

Benefits

- A robust, stable, flexible system that has adapted to massive growth without further cost
- Company-wide integration, streamlined processes, time and cost savings
- Improved margin control and profitability
- Ease of use and integration with Microsoft Excel
- Rapid management accounts and reporting
- Improved customer service, credit control and cash collection.

"Dynamics AX is a totally reliable and flexible platform that has enabled us to improve our business and also manage huge changes in the business in the last six years."

Anthony How, Financial Director, James Fleming & Co

Situation

Established in 1860, James Fleming & Co is a manufacturer of quality food ingredients and products generally using sugar-based raw materials. The company has built a national reputation for quality and excellence and is now part of the German-based, global-operating Südzucker Group.

Flemings' products satisfy a wide range of customer needs within the bakery, confectionery, chocolatier and food manufacturing sectors.

To meet ever-changing market demands, Flemings has a progressive policy of developing new products and new market sectors, allied to continuous intensive capital investment in technological equipment.

However, the company's IT strategy was struck a temporary blow when Multisoft, the supplier of its financial software, was bought by Sage, who subsequently decided to cease support for Multisoft.

According to Anthony How, Financial Director at Flemings, the alternative software solution



suggested by Sage was not particularly attractive.

Flemings' FD therefore took advice from his Group's corporate IT department in Belgium. At the time the IT policy suggested a choice of two systems: SAP or Microsoft Dynamics AX.

"I had no direct experience of SAP, however my perception was that it was a software system designed specifically for large corporates," says How. "I had virtually no knowledge of Dynamics AX, but the senior Group IT person with whom I consulted had obviously worked with AX before - and he was a huge advocate of the Microsoft solution."

Now Flemings' FD needed to make his own assessment of which system would provide the best platform for Flemings' continued development and growth.



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Management reporting and Excel integration made easy

Anthony How was impressed with AX because it could do all the core things exceptionally well: POs, sales orders, stock control, production, bill of materials, master planning and more.

Once implemented, AX exceeded his expectations. A feature that How refers to repeatedly is AX's natural integration with Microsoft Excel: "It's fabulous," he enthuses.

"I have four different versions of monthly management accounts to prepare for different parts of our Group. Also, I have to analyse sales in tonnages, not just in pounds and pence.

Our Dynamics AX system makes it easy for me, as I can export AX reports straight into Excel or via ODBC, then fine-tune the xls worksheets to quickly create what I need. It allows me to work within the Group's tight reporting timeframe."

Anthony How, Financial Director,
James Fleming & Co

"Every week I have to create foreign currency payment reports to share with our sister companies overseas. The AX system's export to Excel facility is so helpful - it saves me so much time."

Audrey Wood, Purchase Ledger,
James Fleming & Co

Solution

After his experience with Multisoft, Anthony How had very firm ideas about the attributes Flemings needed in a business system. Foremost amongst these was an inherent flexibility to meet their demands out-of-the-box, but also to be able to tailor the system where appropriate to Flemings' specific needs (a strength of Microsoft Dynamics AX he recognised immediately). Ease of use and long-term guaranteed continuity of support were also key requirements.

Further investigation of his two corporate IT-approved systems confirmed How's initial feelings about the SAP system: it was indeed too big, complex and inflexible for Flemings' current needs.

"Large parts of our Group do use SAP, and it's a capable software package - but I felt it wasn't right for us," explains How.

"By contrast, Dynamics AX seemed to be perfect for a company of our size. At the same time, AX had the ability to grow with us. It was easy to use, flexible and scalable - it could clearly handle significant growth if required."

A Group restructuring decision now meant that Flemings would shortly have two sites hundreds of miles apart. Its site in Livingston, West Lothian, would house customer service, admin and finance. Manufacturing, warehousing and distribution, meanwhile, would be consolidated at Flemings Wigan (home of a fully-owned subsidiary formerly known as Mather's). In addition, production of some products would move to another Group factory in Belgium.

The requirement to seamlessly link multiple sites became another major consideration.

"We were now in a position where we needed the ability to integrate operations across different sites and continents," continues How.

"When we looked at AX in detail, it was clear it offered everything we had in our old system - and a whole lot more. Added to that, AX is from Microsoft, which meant a familiar user interface and a long-term road map and support - that was an enormous plus." Ultimately, therefore, the choice of a replacement business system was simple.

Having decided on Dynamics AX, How set about finding an implementation and support partner that had the knowledge and ability to meet Flemings' needs. Flemings' senior management met with three companies, including Scottish-based Integrys Solutions.

"Having talked to each potential partner we all felt that Integrys would do the best job for us," says How.

"Integrys Solutions' AX specialists were a big asset. Their knowledge of the whole AX system - and specifically how they saw AX helping us achieve our business goals - was extremely impressive."

How continues: "We were looking for a system we could move across to confidently and happily - and Integrys made it happen. Whenever we asked them, 'Can the system do this for us, or can it do that?', their people demonstrated great technical expertise and were also very helpful. And it wasn't just their systems knowledge; their manufacturing industry expertise added real value."



Benefits

Managing huge change and growth without additional systems investment

"One of the most remarkable benefits of Flemings' AX system, according to How, has been its ability to cope easily with massive business change.

Shortly after installing AX it was decided to 'hive up' its subsidiary Mather's into Flemings - a large project that AX handled with ease.

Then, with the fully integrated AX system bedded in and smoothly running business, a massive opportunity presented itself. As part of a move to streamline Group logistics and improve customer service, the Südzucker Group decided that Flemings should take on sales of sugar for the Group across the UK and Ireland. This development substantially drove Flemings' annual turnover, and again AX coped with this with ease.



Seamless multi-site solution integrates production

Company restructuring has resulted in Flemings' HQ remaining in Scotland and production being consolidated at two other sites - in Wigan and Belgium.

"Our Dynamics AX system really has simplified the task of integrating, streamlining and controlling production. The system tells us everything we need to know about stock control. This saves us hours every week because in the past we had to walk the floor and make checks manually. AX also makes ingredients calculation an exact science, cutting wastage and delays. We are also taking full advantage of AX's master planning module to plan production in Belgium from here in Wigan."

Graham Munro, Logistics Manager,
James Fleming & Co

"We see Integrys as a long-term business partner and trusted advisor. They did an excellent job for us, we have a strong relationship with them, and I have recommended, without hesitation, Integrys and Dynamics AX to other manufacturing companies."

Anthony How, Financial Director,
James Fleming & Co

For more information about Flemings' products please visit their website at:

www.flemings.org.uk

Benefits *continued*

Protecting margins and driving profitability

Flemings' FD explains: "Our turnover increased substantially overnight, yet such was the flexibility of the Dynamics AX system Integrys had designed for us, not a penny more had to be spent on modifying the system. We simply managed the additional revenue stream internally and AX took everything in its stride. We added one more person on the admin side - that was the full extent of the additional investment required to handle this huge increase in business."

With such high dependence on sugar as both an ingredient and a product in its own right, it was critical that Flemings could react swiftly to shifting prices of this core commodity.

"As sugar is in the Agrimonetary USCR mechanism we regularly need to adjust customer prices at very short notice; we also need to switch between sterling and euro pricing at the touch of a button," explains How.

He continues: "Prices are linked to GBP/Euro movements and are reviewed fortnightly - they tend to change at least once a month. So if the pound is weakening then our margins are eroded very quickly. Like all food manufacturers, we work on slim margins, so easy access to pricing data and a rapid response to any change are vital."

"Integrys saw how important pricing reviews were to our business and wrote a sugar pricing programme within AX. It's been invaluable to us and has been instrumental in improving margin control and profitability."

Bringing everything together to improve company-wide efficiency and cash flow

"Before, if the old system couldn't do something, we worked around it, which wasn't ideal," says How.

"In contrast, AX has brought together large numbers of 'external islands' of data and expertise, which now 'talk' to each other. With our old system this wasn't possible, but with AX it's all in one place, and all easily accessible."

One example is the handling of VAT. How explains: "Now we just click a button and the AX system creates the VAT return. This, and other similar examples, has saved us huge amounts of time. Previously we had to input all the figures."

Fiona Paton, who works on sales order processing, concurs: "Now I can click between stock and order screens instantly. I can also quickly access product data such as sugar content, shelf life, and packs-per-pallet. I can invoice in blocks, too, rather than having to open each sales order then create the corresponding invoice. AX saves me a lot of time and has helped me deliver a faster and better service to customers."

Rebecca Gray, Flemings' Production Coordinator, gives the following example of how AX has enabled more efficient coordination of the order processing workflow: "During the mincemeat season, which becomes very busy, inventory and resources change rapidly and with easy access to detailed reports and multiple screens we can react quickly to customer requests and changes"

Bringing a new stability to everyday operations

How found the move from Multisoft to Dynamics AX straightforward.

"With help from Integrys moving all our data and records across was relatively easy - and one of the first things we noticed was how stable the AX system was," comments How.

"Our old system would crash if a user turned off a terminal without shutting down the system first, which meant we were frequently going through the 'Restore' process. AX just works, which is fantastic. Another AX benefit is the way it retains detailed data and handles documents. Our old system distilled historical data down into just the key figures. AX retains everything, so we can retrieve a sales order going back years if we need to. We can also print documents to pdfs and email them, which means we can move closer to a paperless office and save not only time but also space, paper and postage costs."

How has no regrets over his decision to move to Dynamics AX and engage Integrys.

He concludes: "We see Integrys as a long-term business partner and trusted advisor. They did an excellent job for us, we have a strong relationship with them, and I have recommended, without hesitation, Integrys and Dynamics AX to other manufacturing companies."

About Integrys Solutions

Integrys is Scotland's most experienced provider of services for solutions based on Microsoft Dynamics AX technologies, including Microsoft Dynamics 365 for Finance & Operations. With our in-depth product knowledge and long experience of working with Scottish-based businesses, you can trust us to provide expert advice and hands-on support.

Integrys is a fully certified Microsoft partner. We were the first organisation in Scotland to be accredited to deliver Microsoft Dynamics AX and can draw on the support of Microsoft's local team of solution specialists, whenever necessary, to achieve our customers' business goals.

Founded in 2002, we have been delivering solutions based on Microsoft Dynamics AX ever since the product was launched. We have extensive experience of working with manufacturing, distribution and project based companies.

Integrys is a privately-owned business based at the Eurocentral industry hub, between Glasgow and Edinburgh. From this convenient, central location on the M8 motorway, we can easily reach customers right across Scotland, providing a personal and responsive level of service.



Integrys clients include:

Caledonian Plywood Company
Ingram Brothers
James Fleming & Co Ltd
Moorbrook Textiles Ltd
Rosti Technical Plastics
Semex
Shin-Etsu Handotai Europe
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