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Integrated Sage solution is key element in The Signature Works growth strategy

“Our solution has become very central to our growth. We now need fewer resources to obtain better information, such as like-for-like year-on-year comparisons. This ready access to information means we can invest our time in the business, rather than chasing our tails.”

Malcolm Ditty, Director, The Signature Works Ltd



Client profile

Established in 1973, The Signature Works Ltd is Ireland's largest embroiderer and printer of corporate, leisure, sportswear, schoolwear, workwear, and promotional products.

Operating as Sports Crest for several decades, the company rebranded in 2010 to reflect the growing diversity of its services and customer base. From originally supplying mainly to clubs and societies, today The Signature Works serves a range of sectors, including business, local government, education and not-for-profit. Based in Bangor, County Down, the company employs thirty-four people and has a turnover of over £2 million.

The challenge

By 2008, having invested heavily in machinery, skills and stock to build a strong, competitive business, managers turned their attention to the IT systems underpinning the company's accounts and customer service functions. The business used to rely on Sage 50 Accounts and Goldmine customer relationship management (CRM) software and while these had provided good service over the years, they were approaching end of life and were unable to handle rising transactions volumes and an expanding user base.

The search was on for a more powerful solution that would integrate accounts and CRM, and increase efficiency while delivering excellent service to customers. Pinnacle was chosen to supply such a solution, in preference to the company's incumbent Sage Business Partner.

Director Malcolm Ditty, recalls, "We were impressed by Pinnacle's knowledgeable approach, ability to configure an integrated package to our requirements, and reputation as a market-leading provider of Sage software."

The solution

Pinnacle proposed a solution based on Sage 200 with Sage 200 CRM. The integrated solution also incorporated Spindle Professional software to provide paperless document management. The Signature Works had considered a fully bespoke system, but Pinnacle could customise Sage 200 sales order processing and order tracking to align with the needs of the business, avoiding the cost and complexity of a bespoke system.

Malcolm says that, despite the scope of the implementation, within a few days the system was hard at work, supporting the business, "We quickly came to grips with using our new software. Naturally, we had to call the Pinnacle helpdesk a few times in the early days and they were always very helpful."

There are nine users of Sage 200 and twelve of Sage 200 CRM. Sage 200 uses the Microsoft SQL Server database, which is very user-friendly and can take the weight of multiple concurrent users

The benefits

Malcolm highlights the pride in customer service that has been instrumental to the company's steady growth over the years. The value of an order can range from a single customised garment to supplying

and screen-printing several thousand promotional items to support a major event, such as the Inter-County All Ireland Gaelic Championships. He stresses, "Every customer matters and over 90% of orders come from repeat customers and word-of-mouth referrals. We know that small orders can turn into large orders further down the line, if handled well."

With high levels of repeat business, it's essential that staff can track and trace every interaction with a customer, from historical information on past orders through to a snapshot of the status of any current order.

The Sage solution gives staff instant access to a shared pool of data. Malcolm reports, "With information seamlessly at our fingertips, we can instantly respond to customers' requirements and queries and give them the answers they need. It's very impressive! At the same time, with two-way synchronisation between Sage 200 and Sage 200 CRM, staff taking orders will be made aware if there are any problems with the customer's account, without needing to be on the accounts system at the time. The flags are a lot better than with our previous system, too."



There's an additional benefit in that the system supports feedback to staff, helping to improve customer service by enabling managers to discuss with staff how calls have been handled and closed. Similarly, for sales, conversion rates can be monitored to identify how much has been won or lost or is flowing through the pipeline.

The Spindle software brings the benefits of automated and streamlined communications. Documents such as acknowledgements, despatch notes, invoices and regular monthly statements can all be produced and sent electronically.

Malcolm notes, "Around two-thirds of our customers prefer this method of communication. There are real time-savings and efficiencies. For example, the acknowledgement sent out automatically highlights any issues at the front end, by 'playing back' the order to the customer and enabling them to correct any errors or omissions. Being able to send out invoices and statements promptly has also improved our cash flow by reducing debtor days. With an electronic audit trail, we can be confident that a communication has gone out and can confirm this with a quick search."

As well as effectively supporting day-to-day operations, the integrated solution generates the management information that is vital to maintaining control of the growing business. Wide variations in order size and a diverse customer base make it a complex business to manage. The Sage solution provides accurate, up-to-date business data that is essential to sound decision-making.

Malcolm explains, "Our solution has become very central to our growth. We now need fewer resources to obtain better information, such as like-for-like year-on-year comparisons.

This ready access to information means we can invest our time in the business, rather than chasing our tails."

The regular management reports produced from the system are of great help: "They show us constantly how well we're doing in areas such as debtors and creditors, while each day late in the afternoon we receive a sales update. It's much easier to extract and manipulate data, and reports such as profit and loss reflect the current picture, rather than having a three-week time lag. Having this information to hand enables us to be much more proactive. Our accountant reports that bank reconciliation is simpler and faster, too."

The future

As a forward-looking and enterprising business operating in an extremely competitive market, The Signature Works is always on the lookout for ways to improve service without increasing overheads. This commitment to continuous improvement may at some point see the integration of a separate web-based eCommerce operation into the Sage solution.

As Malcolm says, "We constantly review, simplify and rationalise our processes to reduce costs and complexity wherever possible and it's good that we can fine-tune our Sage solution to support our evolving business."

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Malcolm Ditty,
Director,
The Signature Works Ltd

Solution overview

- An integrated solution, comprising Sage 200 and Sage 200 CRM, with Spindle Professional for paperless document management
- A system that supports the company's continuing drive to improved efficiency
- Up-to-date business information on which to base management decisions
- Rapid access to customer information for all authorised staff
- Knowledgeable support from Sage Business Partner Pinnacle

For more info, visit
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