



Premium fish and seafood supplier Kingfisher (Brixham) is netting the rewards of company-wide visibility, reliable business data and full traceability, following its implementation of leading food industry solution, Formul8 from Sanderson.

A perfect catch

Kingfisher (Brixham) is a fishmonger with a difference. Unlike the traditional high street operation, this is a major privately-owned organisation that turns over almost £10 million and employs 85 people.

Since it was established in 1982, Kingfisher has built an enviable reputation for supplying the catering industry with the best quality fish and seafood. It has two sites in Paignton – the main facility and another smaller unit nearby where it

processes frozen product – and another site in Newlyn, where more buyers are located. Product bought at Newlyn is taken back to Paignton for processing and onward despatch.

Customers range from blue chip organisations to individuals – and from double Michelin-starred restaurants, through high-end gastro pubs and bistros, to hotel chains. It's obviously a complex array of customers with diverse demands. But Kingfisher's success doesn't only come from

Toby Bennett Senior Manager Kingfisher (Brixham) Ltd

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providing quality product; it’s also a great service that adds value, says senior manager Toby Bennett: “We don’t just put wet fish in a box and resell it. We process it here; filleting it and preparing it to order, so that when the chef opens the box, the fish is pretty much ready to go straight into the pan. It’s all about shore to door, and that’s what our customers really value.”

The business has expanded significantly in recent years – since 2000, turnover has leapt from £2 million to £10 million – largely due to the increasing popularity of fish and seafood as part of the UK diet. “We could see this change and we decided to become more sales driven to take advantage of it,” says Bennett. It was all about becoming more proactive: “We have sales representatives out on the road and an in-house telesales team taking calls until 11pm each evening.” Orders are taken throughout the day for delivery the following morning.

Increased sales meant increased pressure on processes and by the end of 2005, the company knew it needed to make operational improvements if it was to cope with further growth.

“At that time, we ran on a combination of Sage accounts, spreadsheets and paperwork,” recalls Bennett. Orders were handwritten on cards and those cards were transferred around the factory. Information was input manually into the accounts system for invoicing. “With the help of people from our local Manufacturing Advisory Service (SW MAS), we worked on ways to bring better structure and order to the business. We identified several weaknesses in information flow,” says Bennett. “Our people had to physically move the cards around the factory and the cards

sometimes went astray. There was duplication and even triplication of information, making it inefficient, error prone and time consuming. We knew we had to change, but we needed the right business software to support that change.”

Bennett headed a project team to source a solution: “We looked at several systems and shortlisted three, including Formul8 from Sanderson. We could see that Sanderson had vast experience in the food industry and the core framework was all there in their product, as was their understanding of crucial issues like traceability and stock management. Their product really stood out.”

This was clearly a project of significant proportions for Kingfisher: “No-one here had any experience of system implementations,” says Bennett. “But we didn’t just nibble at the system, we bit off a big chunk straight away. I think we expected it to be quite difficult, but in fact it was a very smooth transition and that was as much down to the round-the-clock support from Sanderson as the system itself. They helped and guided us throughout the process.”

Kingfisher went live in March 2007 and the operation was transformed overnight. Now, Kingfisher is using the system for order taking, picking, processing, stock information and management – “it manages everything internally,” says Bennett.

Touchscreens have been installed on the factory floor. Information is now streamed automatically, enabling staff to manage their workload more easily. “Previously, the cards were laid out in customer order and moved to the key points around the factory. Now, our people can



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see what work is required, and when; they don't have to wait for the previous area to finish a job.”

Just one year on from implementation, the company is reaping significant benefits. In administrative terms, for example, there's much greater efficiency in the offices and the managers can see, at a glance, what's happening in each area.

Compliance with food industry regulations is much simpler than before. Product recalls used to be difficult, time consuming and costly: “If we had a problem with a piece of cod, for example, we had to recall all cod sold within a two- or three-day window,” says Bennett. “Now, we have full traceability for every product, not only those required by law, and we can trace by batch, by supplier, by customer... This system has enabled us to go above and beyond what the law requires. We've put ourselves in a very strong position for the future; this is enabling us to keep one step ahead.”

The system is also proving to be a winner in terms of stock visibility and inventory management – which, in turn, helps to boost customer service levels. Bennett explains: “Now we can manage everything by batch. We can see what's arrived, what is left in stock and how quickly a product is moving.

And order problems have reduced dramatically – before, we often oversold on a particular item because we were working from a sheet of paper. Now, the system warns us when stocks are low on an item so we don't ever get into that situation.”

When it comes to final order checking, it's simple: “At despatch, the loading schedule is run for each van, which shows the number of boxes of each size for each customer. Today, that's a simple operation that takes seconds. A year ago, it was nothing short of a nightmare! The guys had to walk around each pallet with a sheet of paper, to tally up box sizes for each order – and when you're under immense time pressure, as we are for deliveries, that just couldn't continue.”

Indeed, the time pressures on Kingfisher are immense. This is a 24/7, time-critical operation with highly perishable goods. Orders for the north of the country are despatched by 8pm; everything else leaves just after midnight. Local restaurateurs and traders collect their orders at 4am.

For Kingfisher, the overriding objective for the system implementation was to improve the flow of information – and that process has changed beyond recognition. “We've been so busy this past year that

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we've not yet performed a detailed analysis of all the benefits, but I can say with absolute certainty that the factory is far more efficient because the information moves electronically, not by hand."

Bennett says that barcoding is the next project in the pipeline: "That will streamline the picking process and bring us even more improvements in terms of stock management and order picking. What we now have is a huge improvement, but the guys still write the batch number on the order label, so we'll bridge that small gap with handheld scanners."

And there are other elements of the system that Kingfisher has yet to exploit – customer care, for example. "We aren't using the customer care module yet, and that's something we have pencilled in for this year. We have several areas still to fine tune, and we know that the system can help us do that."

For Kingfisher's management team, instant access to reports means they can make better decisions, more quickly. Along with the system, Sanderson installed its business intelligence solution to give Kingfisher data analysis capability. "With Formul8's reports alone, we have infinitely more information than we ever had before. But with

business intelligence, we can build different frameworks to analyse our data," says Bennett. "We've only really started to tap into this in the past couple of months, but already we can see how huge the potential is. This will be a key area for us to develop this year."

Bennett says that the system has more than lived up to his expectations: "If you are in the food industry and looking for a system that has the infrastructure for total traceability, this is it. This has the framework already there, so it's essentially an off-the-peg system. This implementation would have been very complicated if we'd had to adapt another system. But it's not just about the product: with Sanderson, you have a team of people that are supportive and responsive."

Back to the future, Kingfisher is determined that this period of growth will continue unabated: "The company is highly ambitious," says Bennett. "We won't stop at this; it's onwards and upwards from here. And we know that, in Sanderson, we have a business partner that will help us achieve our goals. As we expand, we'll need more IT capability and I have no doubt that Sanderson will be with us every step of the way."