

Cosalt International uses IFS Applications™ to enhance customer service

Cosalt International Limited is one of the UK's leading suppliers of safety and protective clothing and equipment for use both at sea and onshore. Products include life rafts, lifejackets and other protective equipment to provide safety in the workplace. In addition the group supplies rope, wire, rigging, nets, chandlery, ships stores, lifting equipment and testing services. Annual sales amount to some £30 million, and the company employs a total of 400 staff across 18 locations. Branches are located in major seaports around the U.K. The company is aiming for growth at a rate of 12 percent per year, through a combination of organic growth and acquisitions.



IFS Applications enables Cosalt to improve its customer relationships and increase its service levels, while cutting administration costs and streamlining its sales process.

The challenge

In early 1998 the decision was taken to upgrade the existing, mainly financials-oriented, IT system to overcome the Y2K problem. However, the company's experience of a rudimentary off-the-shelf contacts management system had demonstrated the benefits of customer relationships management (CRM) for the sales process. Therefore, Cosalt sought a solution that would enable it to better analyze its operations, streamline the sales process and enhance customer service, without increasing administration.

The solution

Several factors led to Cosalt choosing IFS Applications. Firstly, the IFS software could carry out all of the required functions either to the same standard or

better than that of the other potential supplier. In particular, however, the IFS team appeared to gain a far better understanding of Cosalt's business despite having only half a day on site to familiarize themselves. Although Cosalt's business is not complex, it is carried out across many sites, with numerous inter-site transactions

Another important point was that the senior management at Cosalt felt that there was a good cultural match with IFS.

Furthermore, IFS was viewed as a stable company that would be in business for many years, and therefore able to support Cosalt in the long run. IFS is also an international company that Cosalt felt would be well placed to assist with rolling out the software to foreign acquisitions as part of Cosalt's long-term strategy.

Implementation

The implementation started in October 2001. In most cases it was possible to utilize the software so

that no changes were required to Cosalt's business processes. In other cases, Cosalt took the opportunity to streamline its business processes to take advantage of the functionality of IFS Applications. Initially, two parallel pilots were run to prove the system integrity. The IFS team played a key role in keeping the implementation on track. Jason Belcher, IT manager, explains, "So often you hear of companies being wooed by a great sales team and then let down by a poor team of trainers and consultants; this was not the case with IFS. The personnel who came to train us and help us prepare for the implementation were excellent. They really proved themselves, working long, very intense days to solve problems and keep the project on target. And because the same people saw us right through the entire process, we never had to explain things twice. This all helped to ensure that the implementation ran as smoothly and as efficiently as possible." The first site went live during June 2002, followed by a second site two weeks later. After a short interval for bedding in, the rollout continued at the rate of one site per week until completion.

Benefits

Winston Phillips, managing director at Cosalt, believes that major business benefits will accrue from the improved customer service. "Our internal surveys and benchmarking exercises have shown that there is scope for improvement, and IFS Applications provides the tools to help us monitor, report and, consequently,

take the right action. At any time it is possible for senior managers to view exactly the data that they want to, but without having to involve anybody else in collating or reporting it. Only by measuring our performance can we make improvements, and the beauty of the IFS Applications is that we can effortlessly pull out the data that we need. In addition, because all the sites will be sharing a common database, we can easily spot site-to-site discrepancies or seek out best practice and implement it company-wide. Improving customer service leads directly to improvements in business performance, and now we have an excellent system to assist us in serving our customers better."

Financial director, David Robinson, highlights the savings in administration costs, saying, "For a company of our size, this implementation represented a major investment, and there will be ongoing maintenance costs too; but the savings in administration costs should mean that the system will pay for itself well within a three-year period."

Turning to the subject of the software itself, Mr. Robinson says, "Several systems were demonstrated to us during the selection process, but IFS Applications had a 'wow' factor that none of the others did. I am impressed at how flexible the system is. It seems that almost every week there is another peculiarity in our business that IFS Applications manages to take in its stride. I have absolutely no doubt that we made the right decision in going with IFS."