

Customer Leads Development

The most beneficial part of our relationship with BlueStone and SMS so far has been their willingness to listen to us and to take on board our recommendations through their policy of customer lead development.

The Company

TMB Patterns Limited was formed in 1977 to offer a bespoke service of tool making and pattern making for the thermoforming industry. Since its creation the company has grown to some 65 employees with a turnover of £4,000,000 located at two sites in Bridgwater, Somerset. TMB Patterns quickly became the UK's leading manufacturer of thermoforming tools with household name clients in both the UK and Worldwide. These thermoforming tools are used in the creation of plastic moulds used by supermarkets such as Marks & Spencer, Tesco and Safeway and other famous brands such as Estee Lauder and Waddingtons in their products.



The Requirements

Since the company's creation, there has always been recognition by the management of the need for a control of production hours in relation to the cost of the goods being sold. In 1982 the directors of TMB decided to install a computerised job costing system. After performing adequately for some 14 years it was identified that something more sophisticated was required. Ray Vickers, Resources Controller at TMB recalls this episode in the company's history "Whilst the previous system was a more than adequate vehicle for collecting information on hours worked and could compare these against hours estimated, it had no facilities for the collection of material costs."

By the middle of the 1990s the company had grown to a size where there was desperate need to be able to accurately determine the profitability of the product. One of the key issues for TMB was that each of the thermoforming tools they produce is unique, so each tool is in itself a "one-off" job. After a great deal of discussion and a reluctant recognition of the extra administrative burden involved, the decision was made to take on board an integrated job costing system based on Sage Line 100.

The Solution

There followed an evaluation of what was available in the market, recounts Ray "Sapphire was clearly the most suitable

package for our needs. However, whilst it was felt that the job costing was more than adequate, the manufacturing element required enhancement before it could be meaningfully used by the shopfloor supervisor." One of the particular concerns was the machine hours, i.e. the number being allocated to jobs each month and the progression of these hours. These problems were soon overcome by the development team at SMS and within six weeks the system was ready to be used.

"The learning curve was far less painful than the sceptics thought it would be, mainly due to the BlueStone consultancy and SMS Helpdesk in Dundee who showed great patience even with the most inane questions. We now had an integrated job costing system and manufacturing system."

Conclusion

Ray sums up TMB's relationship with BlueStone and SMS has proved itself to be a worthy acquisition which with some enhancement suggested by ourselves is now performing effectively. The most beneficial part of our relationship with BlueStone and SMS so far has been their willingness to listen to us and to take on board our recommendations through their policy of customer lead development. Unlike many other software companies they seem to recognise that we are the ones who should best know how a manufacturing package should work."