



Fox's Confectionery

Company Facts

- Location: Leicester, United Kingdom
- Industry: Food Manufacturing

"We're able to design our own screens, using our own terminology, which enables us to simplify inputting and cut down the number of screens we have to go through."

Barrie Pitney, IT Manager | Fox's Confectionery

When Fox's Confectionery was bought out from Northern Foods, it needed to rescale its IT system. Fox's Confectionery selected Epicor Tropos enterprise resource planning (ERP) to provide equivalent functionality, but without massive support infrastructure.

Long Lasting Sweets

Based in Leicester, Fox's Confectionery employs over 120 people. Founded in 1897, the company was acquired by John Mackintosh & Sons Ltd (subsequently Rowntree Mackintosh) in 1969 and, from 2001 to 2003, was part of Northern Foods. Its Glacier Mints are probably the best-known products in the Fox's Confectionery range but they're not the only famous name in the portfolio. Glacier Fruits; Glacier Dark; Poppets; Just Brazils; XXX mints and the newly branded XXXtreme combine to form a strong brand line-up.

A Change of Scale

In 2003, the company was acquired by Big Bear Ltd and was transformed from a small unit in a conglomerate into a single-site, autonomous company. That change required fundamental rethinking of infrastructure and systems.

"The existing SAP system we had been using was too big and too expensive for our needs," said finance director, Peter Roberts. Fox's Confectionery had an agreement for up to a year's support from the former parent's centralised IT department—but at a very high monthly cost. "We immediately started looking for an alternative system that would replicate existing functionality but at a lower price."

Success Highlights

Challenges

- Management buy out (MBO) meant restructuring business and systems for self sufficiency

Solution

- Epicor Tropos ERP

Benefits

- System to support independent growing business
- Rationalised business processes
- Improved information access
- Reduced cost of ownership

The change also presented an opportunity to strengthen management controls and produce a consistent view—a ‘single version of the truth’, as the saying goes.

“There was some round-the-edge activity in some areas, and we used spreadsheets for forecasting and planning, which meant we had some different perspectives on the data. And there was some considerable duplication of effort, with re-keying of data in creating production plans and shipping documents, for example,” said Barrie Pitney, IT manager. Fox’s Confectionery considered a number of different systems, including continuing to use SAP, before finally selecting Epicor Tropos.

The Search for Self-Sufficiency

“We involved every function within the company and agreed that Epicor Tropos would enable us to be self-sufficient, and that data extraction would be very good,” said Pitney.

While the original objective was to simply replace the previous ERP system functionality, the use of the new system has brought about improvements.

Epicor has also worked with Fox’s Confectionery to enhance the existing capabilities. Integrating volume sales rebates was particularly important. Sales are made through food broker clients to the ultimate customers, and because of this complexity rebates were formerly calculated on spreadsheets. “We wanted the ability to interface orders from external sources, and Epicor wrote a function to make it easier for us.”

Time is of the Essence

Fox’s Confectionery installed three network servers—the Epicor Tropos application server, a Web server and a mail server—and around 50 new workstations and desktop computers. Time to implementation was vital: if it had slipped beyond the 12-months agreed support period, the company would have had to pay even higher fees to its former parent.

“We went live, closed out the accounts on the old ERP and cut the umbilical cord—one month early,” said Pitney.

User-Friendly Environment Helps Transition

Ease of use helped with acceptance and the transition was much smoother than expected.

“Sales are very impressed with the new system and the maintenance of forecasting has become a lot slicker,” said Pitney. “We’re using workstations and desktops, with Microsoft® Office desktop applications, which is a comfortable and familiar environment. Under the previous regime, there were times we couldn’t perform functions we wanted and had to go to central support for help, which was often chargeable.”

Listening to Customers and Moving Forward

“We have found that Epicor listens to its customers. We see extra functionality appearing based on feedback from other users and becoming part of the whole offer,” said Pitney. “We still need some support but we have got large-system functionality within a self-sufficient organisation, and we’re finding a lot of the old restrictions aren’t there any more. We enjoy being masters of our own destiny; we’re producing better information and moving forward.”

In summary Epicor Tropos provides Fox’s Confectionery with the cost effective business systems platform they needed to support their strategy of operational excellence, organic growth and future acquisitions.

About Epicor

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