



Epicor Success Story

James T. Blakeman

Company Facts

- ▶ Location: United Kingdom
- ▶ Industry: Manufacturing – food processing
- ▶ Number of Locations: 1
- ▶ Web site: www.blakemans.co.uk

Success Highlights

Challenges and Opportunities

- ▶ Needed an enterprise package that could grow with the company, was fully integrated with the capability to span all departments

Solution and Services

- ▶ Epicor® Tropos

Benefits

- ▶ Educated employees on the impact their actions can have on different sections of production and overall efficiency
- ▶ Clear picture of orders and production schedule allowing the company to improve planning
- ▶ Helped cut waste and increase production
- ▶ Provided complete traceability on all products—customers can be advised exactly when a product was made, which ingredients were used, and the exact temperature of any given preparation area at each point in the process
- ▶ Helped the company secure accreditation while at the same time satisfying the codes of practice for all its retail and food service customers



James T. Blakeman & Co., manufacturers of the famous Supreme Sausage, is one of Europe's leading sausage and meat product suppliers. Widely recognised for its high quality and standard of service, the company was established in 1953 by James Blakeman, who started by selling sausages on market stalls and from his own van.

Today the company is still owned by the Blakeman family and run by Managing Director Phil Blakeman and his sister Sue Cope, Financial Director, and it has been supplying domestic and export catering as well as fast food markets for almost 60 years. Export markets include the Caribbean, Spain, the Falkland Islands, Dubai and China as well as direct customers in Greece, Portugal, and the Netherlands.

Operating from its state-of-the-art production facility at Newcastle-under-Lyme, Blakemans uses only the finest ingredients to ensure its reputation for consistent high quality is maintained. Sister company James T Blakeman (Services) supplies cooked sausage and meat products to the ready-meal and contract cooking markets. The combined business has an annual turnover of £31 million and more than 150 employees, comprising of 105 in manufacturing and 48 in services.

Relocation and business expansion

Blakemans relocated to its current 40,000 sq ft facility at High Carr Business Park, Newcastle-under-Lyme, in 2008 and this move has enabled the business to expand, almost doubling its turnover. Key to this expansion and increased success has been use of the Epicor Tropos enterprise resource planning (ERP) software system. Tropos had been used by Blakemans since 2004 at its previous site for production planning and stock-takes and replaced their old paper-based methods, where managers had found it difficult to complete accurate reports or track raw ingredients to finished products. Blakemans operates in highly competitive markets and its customers include some of the biggest and most prestigious names in food retail and food service—companies that take quality and delivery reliability extremely seriously. Key to meeting these exacting customer standards is the ability to operate an efficient and consistent production process, managed, monitored, and fine-tuned by the sophisticated Tropos software.

Phil Blakeman explains, “We’ve used Tropos for a number of years now and have come to realise that the more you use it, the more you learn about it and what it can do for you. We are always able to extract the information we need, when we need it, including items such as our monthly management figures that are always spot on with the software.”

“When working with some of the UK’s leading food retailers and suppliers, complete visibility and transparency is vital to ensure we maintain our high level of service and quality. Tropos enables us to manage items such as materials, stock and the planning of our big service lines.”

“Tropos records and controls all our recipes and methodology of manufacture. Everything is recorded as live data in real time and ensures that products are manufactured, packed, despatched, and delivered to our customers at the right time and that their order is correct and exactly as it should be.”

“Everything that happens within our factory has an effect on production with all activity being relevant and interdependent. An important benefit that Tropos has delivered for us is that it has educated our employees on the impact their actions can have on different sections of production and our overall efficiency.”

Quality counts

Phil Blakeman continues, “When we were originally looking for an ERP solution, we looked at several systems and suppliers. We chose Tropos because it offers far better support, a superior

level of reporting and more relevant customer references than any of the others. It has not only met, but also exceeded our requirements and expectations.”

Tropos is a specialist ERP system designed to meet the requirements of food and drink manufacturers, particularly organisations such as Blakemans that supply major retailers or distribute short shelf-life products. The software is particularly suitable for recipe-based ingredient scheduling and production management. This means production can be planned and coordinated very precisely, and in real time, maximising productivity and eliminating wastage.

“Tropos gives us a clear picture of orders and the production schedule which has allowed us to improve our planning,” says Phil Blakeman. “The system also helped us cut waste and increase production because it provides the information our operations managers need to make better and informed decisions.”

Not only does Tropos allow Blakemans to run an efficient and effective operation, it has enabled them to provide complete traceability on all its products—customers can be advised exactly when a product was made, which ingredients were used, and the exact temperature of any given preparation area at each point in the process.

Accreditation and trust

Phil Blakeman credits Tropos as having helped the company secure accreditation while at the same time satisfying the codes of practice for all its retail and food service customers. He says, “We supply to many leading names, and our processes play a huge part in winning and retaining this vital business. Our clients are also extremely impressed with the system we use, because it means we can give them live data and instant traceability of every single movement a product goes through, from the raw ingredients to the finished product.

“By introducing these capabilities, we have set ourselves apart from the competition,” he adds. “Tropos differentiates what we do from the rest. It gives us a better working relationship with our clients because they trust the data we are delivering to them. This way they have complete confidence in the quality of the goods we deliver and it allows them to prove that strict standards have been adhered to in every unit they sell.”

Added value for customers

The move to the new location was by no means a small undertaking for Blakemans which spent £4.4m on the project, doubling its production capacity. Having made this investment,

the company wanted to be sure of deriving the maximum return by running the upgraded plant at optimum efficiency.

In addition to providing full traceability, quality control, and accurate production reporting, Tropos is fully integrated with applications across the business, providing consistent, accurate, and up-to-date information to support management decision-making.

Phil Blakeman adds, "Nowadays customers want greater visibility of our business so that they can plan ahead. We like to meet this need by allowing them to view their own accounts, previous ordering patterns and trigger new orders and as we move forward, eCommerce is a key part of the full service partnership we offer our customers."

Blakemans has also extended similar privileges to its suppliers, multiplying the productivity and efficiency benefits along the supply chain by allowing them to line up stock in advance of orders from the company, ensuring an optimised pipeline for all parties.

Quantified benefits

Quantifying the benefits of using the Tropos ERP system, Phil Blakeman says, "There is no question that we've seen a return on our investment. Our business would not have grown to its current size without Tropos and had we not implemented

the software we'd be operating in the same arena as our competitors, with manual systems and inefficient processes.

In addition, we'd need many more people to handle the same workload. Tropos allows us to be more competitive in the market, gives us credibility with our clients and enables us to run a profitable business."

Phil Blakeman estimates that, without the Epicor system, the business would need to employ two or three more people in quality control and in the planning office and would be 15-20 percent less efficient in production with corresponding benefits in inventory management.

The company prides itself on its quality of produce, believing the key differential is providing the right product at the right price and that their family business values and service levels keeps them ahead of their competitors.

Blakemans has undergone a big period of change—as have many companies since the recession—and not only has the company weathered the economic storm, it has virtually doubled its turnover during the period and continues to go from strength to strength. Tropos ERP has played a major role in this business success story. The last word goes to Phil Blakeman, who says, "We believe Tropos is the best system of its type in the UK market today."

About Epicor

Epicor Software Corporation drives business growth. We provide flexible, industry-specific software that is designed around the needs of our manufacturing, distribution, retail, and service industry customers. More than 40 years of experience with our customers' unique business processes and operational requirements is built into every solution—in the cloud, hosted, or on premises. With a deep understanding of your industry, Epicor solutions spur growth while managing complexity. The result is powerful solutions that free your resources so you can grow your business. For more information, [connect with Epicor](#) or visit www.epicor.com.



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