

CROWN SYSTEM UNIFIES GRAMPIAN T&A



Introduction

Business growth through acquisition had left the Grampian Country Food Group with different time recording methods which was proving increasingly costly in terms of administration and IT support. But thanks to Crown Computing's Open Options advanced time and attendance system, the company has now saved time, improved management information, and reduced operating costs.

The Scottish-based Grampian Country Food Group was established in 1980. Now the UK's leading privately-owned agri-food business, it produces meats for the retail and foodservice sectors. It supplies supermarkets with chicken, pork, beef, lamb, and turkey products, employs 20,000 people, and has a turnover of £1.8 billion.

Before rationalising its different systems, 22 of the company's 38 sites used manual clock cards. Just two locations relied on Crown Computing's Open Options while others ran alternative software alongside three payrolls.

"From the point of view of manual data collection, there were sometimes inaccuracies," says project manager Rob Herring. "Central

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Rob Herring, Project Manager, Grampian Country Food Group.

reporting was not easy either. The main business objective was to deliver a single corporate solution for time and attendance."

Thorough evaluation

The company's production sites range from 100-2,500 people. Any new solution needed to have at least two payroll interfaces, reduce administration and IT support costs, and cut errors. A single central database, divided by sites and accessible over a wide area network, seemed desirable too. Managers wanted easy-to-use software with the promise of activity management support later.

Three suppliers - including Crown Computing - made a formal bid and underwent a week-long evaluation. Their software was put through its paces by users configuring real working patterns and rules. This confirmed Open Options' ability to cope with the complex shift patterns and payment rules historically associated with the food processing industry.

"What swung it for us was the existing relationship we enjoyed with Crown Computing at our Haverhill (Suffolk) and Cookstown (Northern Ireland) sites," said Herring. "We wanted something that we could implement quickly company-wide and Open Options was by far the easiest. What's more, we were able to configure the system ourselves."

Having chosen the first site - a chicken processing plant in Suffolk - a Crown Computing project manager wrote the project plan. Grampian Country Food Group project staff then attended an Open Options systems manager-administrator course backed by on-site workshop days to put the training into practice.

"We had a Crown Computing consultant on site for the first implementation. She knew the system very well and was very professional in her approach. She had a good practical understanding of implementing site rules too," said Herring.



Traditional Goodness



Case Study Grampian Country Food Group

Steady deployment

The project team made steady progress as colleagues worked on a similar rationalisation for payroll. Open Options is licenced for 11,000 employees with interfaces to CedarOpenAccounts OpenPay payroll and OpenPeople personnel systems as well as Hewitt Associates Cyborg payroll. The software runs on a central Microsoft Windows server with a SQL Server 2000 database management system and is deployed via Windows Terminal Services.

Throughout the implementation, Crown Computing provided on-demand telephone assistance as well as occasional workshop days. By April 2007, the software was working in 19 sites with the remainder pending. Each site takes just a few weeks to implement, followed by a formal testing schedule and parallel run. To ensure smooth implementations, Herring says that it's vital to understand the importance of gathering information about shift rules and working patterns in advance. Most importantly, Open Options is able to support site-specific sets of patterns and rules which are only visible at the site for which they are intended.

The difference is remarkable. Having ended the paper-chase with manual clock cards, managers and administrators have more time available. Departmental managers swiftly deal with exceptions or absences online as well pre-booking authorised overtime while administrators easily produce a weekly payroll input file. But it's the system's real-time nature that really helps.

"Managers now know from Open Options at the beginning of the shift how many people they've got in. They also run their own reports for absence and overtime," said Herring. "The administrative effort involved has been significantly reduced."

Employees enjoy faster, simpler clocking using masked barcode or credit-card style swipe cards in Feedback Data Limited's waterproof terminals or legacy Kestrel terminals. The Open Options rules engine configures site-specific rules and working patterns held separately from other sites through a 'visibility' feature.

Return on investment

Grampian Country Food Group has now simplified internal support and cancelled old maintenance contracts. Thanks to Open Options' ease of use and user-configuration, little help is required. There is a solid return on investment and, with two sites left to implement, completion seems assured.

"We made the right choice of Open Options advanced time and attendance from Crown Computing. They are a very professional company and very good on support," said Herring. "Some of our rules and working patterns are so complicated that you wonder how this will be achieved. But we've always managed to implement them using Open Options powerful rules engine."

Open Options may soon be used to support activity management for labour cost breakdowns at product level. The access control feature may also be extended beyond two sites already using it - employees clock-on or gain access to secure areas using the same card. And as Crown Computing adds new functionality to Open Options, Grampian Country Food Group will go further still.



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