



UNILEVER WELCOMES OPEN OPTIONS



Introduction

When Unilever UK Ice Cream wanted to replace an old time recording system, it turned to Crown Computing for the Open Options advanced Time and Attendance system. It has helped the company to cut administrative costs, reduce absence, and gain a new insight into production activities.

Unilever UK Ice Cream owns the Wall's ice cream factory in Gloucester. Employing 486 people, there are ten ice cream production lines making around three million ice cream products a day. Wall's-branded products include Cornetto, Magnum, and Viennetta.

When Unilever first acquired the Gloucester factory - along with three former Birds Eye Wall's frozen food sites - there was an old barcode-driven time recording system in place. "Our ten-year old system was hugely manually-intensive and all it did was produce paper-based reports, the main purpose of which was to capture whether people had attended work or not," said HR Manager Andrew Hurcum.

The allocation of staff costs against specific products lines was a complex manual process involving four full-time clerks and a HR

department administrator. The costs were accrued against each unique stock keeping unit (SKU) code although this was problematical due to many obsolete product variants.

New Activity-based Costing Model

Unilever UK Ice Cream then decided to replace the legacy system and switch to a time-based activity management solution. This would extend the analysis capabilities from the simple categories such as 'production' or 'training' to more detailed activity codes. These would show which production line or office-based task was involved.

"We wanted to get everybody to clock including the site manager," said Hurcum. "Our business drivers were about simplification and moving to an activity-based costing model. We needed a new system to help us plan our production activity."

Although this had to monitor attendance, absenteeism, and sickness effectively, it also had to reduce administration and be easy-to-use. Responsibility was to be devolved to managers and team leaders, people best placed to understand the hours and activities of their staff. They would also handle any administration online rather than through paper-reports.

Several solutions were reviewed including Crown Computing's Open Options advanced employee management system. Of particular concern was simplicity: Was the system easy to use for production line managers? And could it be adapted quickly to reflect local rules changes as the business evolved? But the area most scrutinised was activity recording and analysis which had to be flexible enough to meet the business requirements. Open Options' ability to define 'default' activities with other activity planning features allowed employee time to be captured and allocated very easily.

"Open Options Activity Management would save manual effort in terms of keying and would be easier for line managers to use. It also supported all our requirements for recording job activities," said Hurcum.

"Open Options advanced time and attendance has enabled us to get a grip on our activities. We've used it to drive down cost significantly in the business"

Andy Hurcum, HR Manager, Unilever UK Ice Cream.



Rapid Implementation

The system was originally installed for several locations - only Gloucester remains owned by Unilever. Crown Computing consultants provided software installation, training, and expert assistance with configuration for the Activity Management and Workforce Management modules.

Help was given to define an 'activity tree' to map activities by team or department. Built-in skill matrices and an activity planner within Open Options gave managers the information for scheduling individuals according to their skills while the standard rules engine defined shift patterns, payments, and the treatment of overtime. The new system was live within four months.

"A Crown Computing consultant helped us to manage the whole of the project, implementing what we'd designed on paper and showing us how to configure the rules so the system accurately reflected our requirements," said Hurcum.

Staff working a three-shift rota use a multi-purpose proximity ID card for access control and attendance clocking using Feedback Data Ltd's industry-standard time-clocks. The Open Options time and attendance system then allows product line managers to review attendance and activity exceptions, which are automatically flagged for easy correction. Time reconciliation between attended and 'booked' hours, the booking of holidays by staff via a web browser, and online reporting are now smoothly handled.

Good Understanding

Whenever an employee clocks in, the system allocates their working time to a pre-scheduled task set through Open Option's Activity Planner. Last-minute changes are possible to cope with absences or to switch staff around to cover production demands. Through Activity Management, managers now appreciate labour costs at activity, production line, or factory level thanks to built-in and third party reports. And, if needed, help is just a phone call away.

"Crown Computing has built up a good understanding of our business and their approach to training was excellent. Open Options is very easy to use and does exactly what it says it does. The help desk is extremely friendly and helpful too," said Hurcum.

There's no need for dedicated administrators, absences are down though immediate access to better information, and the payroll is accurate. The company is now deploying people more cost-effectively too.

"Open Options advanced time and attendance has enabled us to get a grip on our activities and to manage absence in a more consistent way. We've used it to drive down cost significantly in the business," says Hurcum.

Unilever UK Ice Cream is likely to expand its investment in this technology. For example, it may consider the Open Options Employee Information Warehouse for key performance indicator reporting. With the help of Crown Computing, Unilever UK Ice Cream continues to make one of Britain's favourite brands.



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