

CUSTOMER PROFILE

LAWSON SOLUTIONS AT PORK FARMS



Seeburger and Lawson provide a Tasty Solution for Pork Farms

The chilled food market is classified by its need for speed. Freshness is critical, so products need to be ordered, produced and delivered quickly. For Pork Farms (the former Nottingham baker's shop turned international fresh food producer) this often means receiving an order at 5:30am, having it in production by 7:00am and ready for dispatch before the end of the day. When timescales are that tight, speed, accuracy and control over all aspects of the supply chain are crucial. That's why Pork Farms turned to Lawson and SEEBURGER, two leading IT companies that know about the chilled food business and how to meet its pressure-filled demands.

A History of Change

The one constant in the history of Pork Farms is the quality of its pastry. The advanced recipe for the company's signature dark and crispy pastry has long been in demand by consumers and businesses alike. Most recently, Pork Farms has been part of the Northern Foods Group, a relationship which came to an end in 2007 and now sees Pork Farms operating in its own right once again. The company has more than 2,000 employees and over four locations in Nottinghamshire and Somerset.

After separating from Northern Foods, Pork Farms had to provide new software for its business. "Under the Northern Foods umbrella, we all used SAP," says Alan Webster, the CIO at Pork Farms. "When we separated, they allowed us to continue using the existing IT systems for a limited time and for a significant fee! This meant that adopting a new enterprise-wide solution to manage the business was a critical business driver and we quickly set up a plan to identify and implement a new solution as quickly as possible."

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He continues, “We had a two year maximum period between leaving Northern Foods and having our own IT infrastructure and software systems fully in place. Of course, we wanted to fulfill this even sooner to remove the costs associated with renting a system that wasn't ours to manage and control. However, this did mean we were able to start with a blank canvas and adopt a system that was truly designed for our industry and that could give us significant business advantages straight out of the box.”

Why Lawson

Pork Farms appointed consultants KPMG to develop a detailed requirements document and send an invitation to tender to all the leading software players in the food and beverage manufacturing and distribution industry. “We looked closely at SAP because that is what we already had. However, we didn't have access to the significant modifications that Northern Foods had made to the system to meet our specific requirements. This meant we would have had to develop functionality to fill the gaps in SAP and we just didn't have the time to achieve this. However, we were delighted to see that Lawson, with its rich experience of delivering ERP solutions to chilled food producers around the world, had a system that was already a very close fit to our requirements,” he adds.

Webster continues, “A lot of what happens on our factory floor is dependent on awareness of the stock at hand and speedy response in terms of stock rotation and movement through the production process. The IT systems need to support this with simple, easy-to-use interfaces. With so many risks of losing stock throughout the production process, as well as the stringent quality control guidelines, a comprehensive, yet uncomplicated software system is paramount. We are regularly audited by retailers who need to ensure the consistency and quality of the products they sell – so fast and accurate availability of information is another key criterion.”

The Lawson reputation in the food industry is second to none and this was the main driving force behind Pork Farms' decision to adopt this as its main ERP business management system. “There are so many hugely important areas that make the chilled foods market unique that working with a company which already knows this and has the functionality in place to fulfill the demands was a huge benefit to us. Lawson demonstrated a high level of competence in our industry and had a product that was pretty much a perfect fit with our requirements. We also felt they were a professional and knowledgeable company that we would be happy to do work – and business – with over a long period,” confirms Webster.



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Why SEEBURGER

Having identified its ERP solution, Pork Farms also needed to make sure that it could easily move across or develop its business-to-business (B2B) connections with customers and suppliers. “Because of the speed with which orders are placed and fulfilled, our industry is particularly dependent on EDI connections. Ninety percent of our business transactions are via EDI, covering orders in, invoices out and dispatch notifications. Retailers deal with so many suppliers that there simply isn’t time to operate effectively with manual orders and if the orders aren’t there in the system when the day opens, you are immediately struggling,” says Webster.

He goes on, “Despite our need for a dedicated, high quality B2B integration system, we also didn’t want to have to work with several disparate vendors. It was therefore very important to us that Lawson would be happy to work with an integration software vendor and the two companies could themselves integrate. We identified SEEBURGER as the most functional, capable and advanced B2B integration solution and demonstrated how well this worked within the Lawson system. The people at Lawson also recommended SEEBURGER and we were more than happy that the two companies would work very well and positively together for us.”

Lawson is able to extract information from the back office systems and provide it in a format that SEEBURGER can understand and use via any number of B2B connections. Similarly, SEEBURGER provides information back to Lawson, which integrates automatically with their ERP system. SEEBURGER is a very flexible, adaptable and comprehensive solution that can meet any business integration requirement. We have demonstrated several times in implementations around the world that SEEBURGER and Lawson are an excellent combination that enables end users to derive significantly increased cost savings, supply chain accuracy and efficiency gains.

Implementation

Having selected Lawson and SEEBURGER, Pork Farms needed to move fast in order to be up and running before the rental agreement with Northern Foods came to an end. The process started in January 2008 and the first site was live in May, with the final site going live by the end of August. “The go-live went well and created very little commercial impact on our business. There was no time for parallel runs, so we had to get the system up and running, receiving and managing orders, right from the first switchover. I am delighted to say that with a lot of hard work from all the project teams, the systems went live on time, within budget and with very little disruption,” says Webster.

Benefits

“Compared to what we had with SAP, Lawson is a much less complicated system that fulfils our business requirements in a straightforward and understandable manner. The overall running costs are more than 50 percent lower than before and the time required to train people is much less – often as little as one day,” says Webster.

He continues, “We have also been delighted with the resilience of the system. We need it to be available 100 percent of the time, sitting there quietly and not making a fuss. We just don’t have time to be worrying about how the software is holding up – we just need it to be doing what it is supposed to be

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doing. And that is exactly what Lawson and SEEBURGER have done. In almost a year of running, there have been very few issues despite hundreds of thousands of transactions.”

SEEBURGER has also helped Pork Farms manage its data interchange relationships with customers on a positive and proactive basis. Webster explains, “Retailers regularly make changes to the way they want to handle EDI content both in and out of their companies. Thanks to SEEBURGER, this simply isn’t an issue any more. It can adapt easily to any changes the retailer makes and the changes are resilient. It really is the most reliable and consistent system you could work with.

Future Plans

“A major objective for us is to bring even more of our business relationships with retailers onto an automated, electronic basis. The sooner we can trade electronically, with both customers and suppliers, the sooner all parties can enjoy the cost and efficiency benefits these bring. Both Lawson and SEEBURGER make this process very easy and we are working hard to add new business and develop new relationships using electronic B2B as the backbone,” says Webster.

He adds, “Looking further forward, we are very keen to take advantage of the comprehensive business intelligence tools within Lawson that will help us make better management decisions for the business and improve our business planning and demand forecasting. By tightening up our business controls, we know we can make even more cost savings and efficiency gains throughout the business, which will help us to be even more responsive to our customers and enable further opportunities to save cost and drive profitability in all areas of the business.”

In conclusion, Alan Webster highlights the relationship Pork Farms has enjoyed with both Lawson and SEEBURGER. “Throughout what has been a fairly difficult time for our company, both Lawson and SEEBURGER have been with us every step of the way. We have all worked together really well to make sure we have fulfilled our core objectives of being live within a tight deadline with a system that runs our business effectively. The consultants from both companies have been fully committed to making sure we achieved these objectives and have been with us throughout our first year to ensure everything continues to work smoothly and efficiently. Their knowledge of both the technology and the chilled foods industry has been a huge benefit to us and we are more than happy with the solution and our choice of suppliers.”

LAWSON PRODUCT PARTNER

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About Pork Farms

Established in 1931 as a small shop in Nottingham, Pork Farms is now one of the leading bakeries in the UK. The company has more than 2,000 employees, with teams spread across three locations in the UK: Nottingham, Market Drayton and Shaftesbury.

As well as producing the UK’s favourite pork pie, Pork Farms bakes a variety of other pork pies, slices, pastries and scotch egg.

<http://www.pork-farms.co.uk/>