

HARNESSING IT

INTERVIEWS

Mike Holding

MANAGING DIRECTOR

Paul Titchener

FINANCE DIRECTOR



Taylor Made
COMPUTER SOLUTIONS

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In a series of interviews with Taylor Made Computer Solutions, directors reveal what they perceive to be the issues if IT is to deliver key objectives.

The interviews will be brought together as a report to be published by DECISION magazine and then as a digital book.

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NO-ONE COULD have completed their schooling without sitting next to a heating product made by Dunham-Bush. And the company's approach to IT is something of an education.

The company pioneered computer-aided design in this country. "We were the second user of AutoCAD in Europe back in 1982," explains managing director Mike Holding.

It's all more sophisticated today. Once a design is perfected and ready for production, the company's material requirements planning (MRP) system aids production planning, scheduling, and inventory control. "It enables us to have all the information to hand to make quick decisions, to keep track of every order as it goes through the production process," he says.

"UK manufacturers which are surviving or thriving are those which offer bespoke or the widest choice of products, and for that to happen, IT is mission critical. Let me give you an example There are 64,000 versions of our fan convector heater, and our MRP system enables us to manage that degree of complexity."

Dunham-Bush design, manufactures and sell heating and cooling products, primarily for commercial, institutional and industrial environments. Their customer relationship management system has an important function in enabling the company to interacting with the customers throughout the process.

To illustrate how much the CRM helps, finance director Paul Titchener cites the example of the schools sector – still a big market for Dunham-Bush and one that has undergone major changes in recent years.

The last Labour government's 'Building Schools for the Future' investment programme was set to see hundreds of secondary school buildings revamped – but was scrapped by the incoming coalition government in 2010. And subsequent changes to school management models mean that school infrastructure projects are no longer necessarily managed by county councils.

"The route to market is much harder than it used to be," says Titchener. "Now instead of a group of engineers making decisions for all the schools in a county, we may be dealing with a contractor who is probably working direct for one school.

"We have to collate inquiries we receive, and see if we have already had that inquiry from somewhere else. An inquiry about a school may not even come from the immediate area; for example a contractor in Nottingham may be enquiring about a school in Devon. So for us, CRM is even more important."

IT has brought about some deeper changes in company culture, Harding believes. One of these is embracing openness: information which could be considered commercially sensitive is freely shared. "We made the decision to publish all our product brochures and technical specifications online," he explains. "We thought 'what about the competition?' but we figured our focus should be on what our customers want to be able to see."

As well as brochures, resources shared freely on their website include product manuals, 'how-to' videos and 'building information modelling' – or BIM

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– files. BIM is a process of creating a digital model of products and building components, enabling architects, suppliers and others to build their own virtual models of the projects they are working on. Dunham-Bush now makes BIM files available for all its products, which architects can download and incorporate into their own BIM models, to show how the company's heating or cooling equipment would work within the building they are designing.

"Someone here has to create a BIM file for each product," explains Holding. "The BIM file will have a picture and attributes such as how much electricity it uses and how much heat it produces. The draughtsman takes the inventor file and turns it into a BIM-suitable format."

BIM is becoming an increasingly vital tool for sales, says Titchener., "Ten to fifteen years ago, our salesmen would go out for a beer with the architects. Today there's no appetite for that. The preference is to have suppliers who have information readily available."

Availability has become the operative word on a personal level as well thanks to IT, he believes. Titchener describes cloud-based email as "an absolute godsend" as he and colleagues can deal with emails wherever they are. Even when he's skiing in Andorra on holiday. "At the end of the day I can sit down at the bar and spend half an hour going through my emails."

But careful decisions have to be made about how accessible office systems can be. While most of the

staff can access their emails from home, for security reasons they can't get into the MRP remotely.

Dunham-Bush manage the security challenges by keeping their data on their own server, as well as a back-up server off-site. "All our machines are locked down so only three people can access someone else's machine," explains Harding. "We have had a virus attack once through an email but because we have a locked-down system, it couldn't spread."

Developments in IT have brought about big changes to ways of working, helping the company grow from a small family firm to part of a global group, operating on a worldwide scale. It means new products are only adopted with a clear analysis of the benefits they will bring.

"IT makes more work but it provides more 'operationality'," says Titchener. It means that when a new product is launched it is because we have been able to gain the clearest analysis of the financials and likely demand. We wouldn't be able to manage the product range, the route to market and the speed to market without a robust IT system. It would be impossible."

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Established in 1994, Taylor Made Computer Solutions are one of the largest and most highly-ranked IT service and support organisations in the south, currently employing over 110 staff.

Taylor Made are the first technology company in the region to have gained a third consecutive gold award from Investors in People. Taylor Made are also ISO 9001:2008 certified.

The company has been ranked in the top 10 managed service providers in Europe the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) in a leading annual industry survey from MSPmentor since 2012.

Taylor Made are a Microsoft Gold Certified Partner, HP Preferred Partner and a NetApp Silver Partner.

Services include:

IT support, IT strategy, IT consultancy, hosted telephony, project management, Securo online back-up, hosted solutions, remote management and monitoring, cloud solutions, disaster recovery, remote access, outsource engineering, security, service desk support.

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