

BLENDS HOLDINGS IN THE MIX FOR MANUFACTURING GROWTH

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Over the last 21 years, Liverpool-based Blends Holdings has established itself as one of the UK's leading manufacturers of specialist food ingredients.

Through innovation and diversification, the family run business has developed four strands: commodity food ingredients such as glycerine and glucose; food flavours; food colourings; and co-packing for big names like Dr. Oetker, Revolution Bar Group, Aldi and Lidl.

In the last two years Blends has doubled its manufacturing facilities on Knowsley Business Park to 70,000 sq ft and has plans for a new £500,000 extension to accommodate its 60 staff. Turnover has also doubled to £23M and the future looks even brighter.

But the family business – run by Mike and Ann Rowark and their sons Michael and Phillip – recognise the major barrier to growth is its reliance on outdated, paper-based systems.

It has set its sights on adopting Industry 4.0 technologies to make it more efficient and boost productivity.

THE CHALLENGE

Blends uses various basic software to process data for sales and purchases, generate quotes and invoices, and process recipes and orders.

It is also reliant on spreadsheets to monitor and process new product development, meaning the business is too slow to react to opportunities.

Meanwhile, data used in the technical and quality control systems is processed manually, which is time consuming and prone to duplication and error.

Michael said while functional, none of the software solutions communicate with each other.

“We’ve been growing the business gradually to ensure reliable service to our customers and not overselling our capabilities,” he explained. “But we are walking around with scraps of paper recording information and typing it into spreadsheets.”

“We’re now at a crucial point when we need to eliminate those flaws and become more streamlined and efficient. We need the software to do much more - and quicker.”

THE SOLUTION

With the help from Made Smarter Blends has devised a project to use a combination of food industry specific manufacturing and supply-chain management software.

The cloud-based solution will enable real-time and remote analytics and monitoring by the management and executive team.

Michael explained: *“The ERP software system we have chosen will replace our disparate systems to manage all your recipes, production, supply chain, traceability and reporting.”*

“This first step into digitalisation is going to make a significant difference to our entire operation.”

THE BENEFITS

Michael believes that by channelling the manual and duplicated tasks of data recording into a single operation will improve efficiency by 50%.

Michael said: *“By eliminating the labour currently devoted to the process of working around those software flaws – which is one full time employee – we will be significantly more efficient. That role would move into sales, giving us more opportunity for growth.”*

“The elimination of paper, spreadsheets, clipboards and pens will have a major impact on our workforce. It will remove frustrations, delays, uncertainties and the opportunity to be blamed for errors. More technical skills and training in our new software will really enhance job satisfaction.”



The new software will give Blends access to new data, which Michael believes could reduce packaging waste by 25%.

“Ultimately it will massively speed up processes in the factory and form the backbone for future digital expansions,” he added.

The project is also expected to benefit the region's GVA increasing by £1.5M over the next three years.

THE FUTURE

The new system is designed to allow for the extra capacity as the business grows and becomes more sophisticated.

Michael said this extra capacity ties in perfectly with plans to expand its new product development capabilities.

“Our new 15,000 sq ft extension will give us three new development labs, which illustrates the direction our business is going in,” he said. *“This new software gives us the confidence to drive the business forward.”*

