

Recipe for success

An award-winning artisan producer of healthy food is taking the next step towards future growth following support from Made Smarter West Midlands.

Helen and Bob Graham launched the Ludlow Nut Company after deciding to move from London to Ludlow in Shropshire because of its reputation for Michelin-starred restaurants, specialist food shops, artisan food producers and the popular Ludlow Food Festival.

The couple wanted to turn their love of food and cooking along with Helen's interest in healthy eating and nutrition into a business – and the Ludlow Nut Company was born in 2014.

Fast-forward nine years and the business has progressed from selling high-quality, healthy dried fruit and nuts to expand their product range to also include mueslis, porridge, granolas, nut butters, and roasting and flavouring of nuts.

Helen, who focuses on the administration and customer service aspect of the business, wanted to improve its efficiencies to deal with its increasing number of orders.

Made Smarter West Midlands gave the go ahead for a grant towards a Material Requirements Planning (MRP) software-based system.

Helen said: "It is making us more efficient and more responsive so we can advise customers more accurately when their orders will be ready and stop any potential delays – so it is helping us to retain business as well as win new business.

"The Made Smarter grant along with the expert advice was really important throughout the whole process."

The Challenge

The Ludlow Nut Company is not a food factory mass producing in

huge volumes, but a small artisan producer of healthy food, using only the finest, natural ingredients.

As well as producing a wide range of healthy food under its own product labels, the business provides luxury breakfast cereals, roasted & flavoured nuts, activated nuts and an extensive range of nut butters for customers who use their own branding.

This meant an added complication to its previous processes for its ten staff from its base in Foldgate Lane, Ludlow.

Helen contacted The Marches Growth Hub about digitising its systems and she was advised to get in touch with Made Smarter West Midlands.

That led to Barry Jones, Digital Transformation Specialist for Made Smarter in Shropshire, visiting Helen at their premises along with Denis Pelych from WMG at the University of Warwick, which is one of Made Smarter's strategic partners.

Helen said: "I showed Barry and Denis around our premises and talked them through our processes.

"They helped with recommending various MRP providers to obtain quotes from and then sat in on the initial meetings with the suppliers and asked pertinent questions since they had a greater understanding of MRP systems than I did.

"That helped in the selection process and once we had decided which company we were going to go with, Barry and Denis attended quite a lot of the implementation meetings with us which was really helpful."

Barry Jones said: "The Ludlow Nut Company is a perfect example of the kind of small businesses that Made Smarter West Midlands can make a real difference to their day-to-day operations by introducing a digital system which staff feel comfortable in using.

"They are now in a position where the MRP software is being used to its maximum to benefit the business and the initial hiccups have been overcome with the help of Made Smarter West Midlands and WMG."

The Solution

Helen and Bob applied for a £10,000 grant towards the purchase of a MRP software-based system which would help the Ludlow Nut Company with its production planning, scheduling, and inventory control.

"We wanted an end-to-end system to track our stock from the goods-in stage through to recipe production, packaging, and finally dispatch to our customers," Helen said.

"Previously, we used to record quotes on spreadsheets and creating a large paper trail, ending with our accountancy system but nothing was joined-up.

"We wanted a system that would give us greater traceability of stock levels which is key to running the business smoothly.

"The importance of selecting the right vendor partner, not just the right software solution was really important because otherwise the outcome could have been very different."

Denis said: "We helped the Ludlow Nut Company to understand the business risks associated with their previous approach to IT systems via a simple architecture diagram and an options and implications session.

"We coached their Project Manager, ran weekly meetings and then handed back to the Project

Manager once they were feeling confident."

The Benefits

The Ludlow Nut Company now has full transparency at every stage of the food process, from ensuring there is enough stock to make the requested products to dispatching orders across the UK.

Helen said: "I think we had got to the stage where we had become too big to maintain our efficiency through our previous system and that was the key for us. The worst thing is when you are about to start making a product and you realise you don't have a particular ingredient because that causes lost time and re-shuffling other orders.

"The implementation programme started last June and we have been fully integrated since January because it was quite a lengthy process.

"It has been complicated by the fact we manufacture goods for other companies which added another level of complexity to the system.

"The new system is more efficient and joins up all the dots as well as having saved duplication of work and we're really pleased with it.

"Applying for the funding was smooth with Barry's help and receiving the grant has meant we have been able to afford the additions for the system.

"We have big display TV screens that show our production schedules but that's a cost we wouldn't have been able to afford without the grant and it has made a big difference having that particular kit.

"Having advice and people you know you can trust and rely on when making these big decisions is really important."

The Future

Phase two of the implementation plan is going well and the Ludlow

Nut Company has successfully introduced all the various elements of the MRP to improve its efficiencies.

Helen said: "Customer feedback is very important to every business and we place our customers at the heart of our business.

"Digitising our business is a fantastic step forward to continue to build on the gold stars we have received from the Guild of Fine Foods as well as our reputation with our clients whether they are on our doorstep in Ludlow or further afield."

Martin Coates, Managing Director, Agrantec, said: "Made Smarter prepared and ran a well-structured competitive RFP process that ultimately led Ludlow Nut to select NotaZone.

"NotaZone provided the company with everything from end-to-end sales, through production-to-dispatch processes including full traceability and inventory control. The platform also delivered complex eCommerce configurations, various sales orders and manufacturing processes to support Ludlow's diverse customer base.

"The team at Ludlow was great to work with throughout the process and the assistance provided by MadeSmarter was invaluable."

Sonia Roberts, chair of The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, said: "I am delighted that the Ludlow Nut Company has been able to improve its processes with the help of our business support arm, the Marches Growth Hub, and the Made Smarter programme.

"I look forward to the Growth Hub continuing to work with the company as it goes from strength to strength."

“ The Made Smarter grant along with the expert advice was really important throughout the whole process. ”



From left: Helen Graham, co-founder of the The Ludlow Nut Company, Martin Coates, Managing Director of Agrantec, and Denis Pelych, Digital Manufacturing Advisor at WMG inside The Ludlow Nut Company's factory

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CASE STUDY