

MADE SMARTER

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From the left, Natalie Benwell (Goodflex Rubber), Paul Sullivan (Made Smarter), Thejaswini Thomas (WMG at the University of Warwick), and Denis

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Another quality step forward

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Goodflex Rubber Co. was established in 2002 by Owner and Managing Director Mark Dufty as a manufacturer and supplier of rubber hoses, moulding and assemblies. With expertise in a wide range of industries such as Automotive, Bus & Truck, Off Highway, Food and Pharmaceuticals, the company serves customers both domestically and overseas.

Adept at prototype and serial production, Goodflex has invested strategically in 3D printing technology for custom tooling as well as acquiring additional businesses to facilitate the continued growth of the company.

In 2021, the 45-strong business made a £500,000 investment into its future following a move from its former 8,000 square feet premises in Worcestershire to a 32,000 square feet facility at Tything Road in Alcester.

Natalie Benwell, Commercial Manager at Goodflex Rubber, said the business identified the need to update its Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, with Jim Clark from Coventry and Warwickshire Growth Hub pointing them in the direction of Made Smarter West Midlands.

She said: "When we approached Made Smarter, their willingness to work with us really stood out, as well as their understanding of our business needs.

"As a business, we knew there were ways we could improve and develop. Made Smarter has helped us to focus on what would be the biggest benefit to the business and put us in touch with experts, who we wouldn't have had access to without joining the programme."

The Challenge

Goodflex Rubber has been using its bespoke ERP system since the business was started and it had evolved over time to be used for material resource planning, accounts, stock management, creating work orders, invoices, and delivery notes.

But the business needed to move to software which would enable their day-to-day operations to be more efficient and allow them to respond more quickly to their customers.

Natalie explained: "We knew that the old system wasn't going to take us where we wanted to go as a company because it was outdated compared to new technology that's now available.

"We had initially considered re-building it but realised that buying a package software solution was the best way forward.

"We have a saying at Goodflex. If our building is our body, our machines are our muscles, our staff are our blood, our MD is our heart, then our ERP system is our brain. Without it, we would fail to survive."

The business contacted Made Smarter West Midlands for support, and Digital Transformation Specialist, Paul Sullivan, came to

visit along with Denis Pelych, Digital Manufacturing Advisor, and Thejaswini Thomas, Digital Transformation Engineer in the SME Group, at WMG at the University of Warwick.

Natalie added: "It was great that Made Smarter could put us in touch with advisors who were experts in their fields because internally we knew that we didn't have the required knowledge.

"It was reassuring to speak to someone who took the time to understand our needs and discuss our concerns, to take us to a point which we couldn't have reached by ourselves. By talking to Made Smarter and WMG, it became apparent there were a few things we needed from the technology to take our business forward that we hadn't initially identified."

Paul Sullivan said: "Goodflex Rubber is a really good example of what can be achieved with an in-depth digital strategy.

"It was important for us to take them on this journey, to build up their confidence whilst giving the advice they needed to understand the technology that was available in the market place and realise the ambitions of their growth plan."

The Solution

The Solution Natalie and the directors at Goodflex Rubber were advised to apply for a £20,000 grant from Made Smarter West Midlands, with the business adding a further £100,000 to buy EFACS E/8 ERP software, which is much more comprehensive, with the latest scheduling and MRP technology.

She said: "This is one of the biggest changes we have ever made. Having the grant support helped us to take that next step.

"We could have worked on this project for three years and we wouldn't have reached this point without working with Made

Smarter because they had the contacts to take us one step further."

Thejaswini Thomas, of WMG, said: "Since Goodflex Rubber had complex requirements from what they needed from an ERP system, we demonstrated a range of products so that they could understand how a new system could support them and help them in the future, not just their current needs."

Her colleague, Denis Pelych, added: "The old system had served Goodflex Rubber well but they realised it was holding them back because, apart from holding data, it didn't do what their business required today, and certainly did not for the future.

"It became clear from our conversations that they should be looking for a full package and the digital roadmap we carried out embodied those needs.

"The business went on a discovery journey to understand a lot more about their business needs and this new system will cement their ambitions."

The Benefits

The transition from the old system to the new technology will take between six to nine months and is due to go live in September 2024.

Efficiencies gained through the system will lead to higher levels of profitability and the new system will provide better management information with the ability to set KPIs and have greater operational insight in order to make data driven business decisions.

Natalie said: "We now have the ability to plan complex manufacturing operations with many constraints, to improve efficiency and assure delivery dates, and capture customer-specific quality data during each step of the production process, as well as automatically produce a variety of documentation on despatch.

"Among the other benefits is the automation of routine office and production management processes, driving efficiencies and cost savings.

"In addition, we are taking this opportunity to carry out data cleansing and create a pilot which we can test and validate before going live."

The Future

Natalie, who joined the business six-and-a-half years ago, said being involved with the Made Smarter programme had been a fantastic learning experience.

"The company has given me confidence because they have confidence in me to make the right decisions," she said.

"Goodflex Rubber is a great place to work and our staff are our biggest asset. We do everything we can to make the working environment as good as we can for our staff and upgrading our ERP system, will help with this.

"As a business, if you are standing still, you are going backwards. To maintain our position as a leading manufacturer in our industry we have to continue to move forward.

"I would encourage other businesses to join the Made Smarter programme because we have found it so beneficial.

"Even if you don't know which way you want to go with your digital technology or if it's an area of weakness where you want to improve, the Made Smarter team will analyse your processes and help you identify those greatest areas of improvement. There's no disadvantage to taking part."

CASE STUDY