



## Howarth Timber makes the right software choice!

Howarth Timber is a timber and building materials merchant operation. Its 29 sites are spread along the M62, down the A1 corridor as far south as Corby, and within the M25. There are approximately 1000 employees.



### Results

- The introduction of robust and capable financial controls
- A flexible system that supports the trading mechanisms of the group
- Accurate stock figures the sales team can rely on
- A 24/7 operation to support on-line sales
- Stock held at optimum levels to meet demand
- Enhanced business intelligence to enable replication of best practice across the group

Paul Cornford, as Group Information Systems Manager, runs a team that is responsible for the IT infrastructure of the entire Howarth Timber Group, as well as the implementation and development of all the systems used by the merchant part of the business.

Paul was part of the team that chose K8, and the software was installed, branch-by-branch, over several months in 2004. Making the right choice of software to drive a business this size is critical. Paul advised those tasked with a similar project: "Don't get bogged down in writing a requirements tome. Make a list, keep it simple and then make a judgement. We used the 'MoSCoW' principle to categorise our list of must haves, should haves, could haves and would likes. KCS won the business on its ability to supply the must haves more or less immediately and the stability of the company as a long term system provider."

As to who should contribute to the functionality shopping list, Paul said it's crucial to involve those who are familiar with the hands on elements of the business. "They'll be far more au fait with the day to day business operation than anyone in a very senior position." After the choice has been made, Paul recommends you need to anticipate, and not underestimate, the impact of the change to the business when the new system is installed and the amount of training end users will need.

Howarth Timber's list of 'must haves' included robust and capable financial controls. "The finance team wanted to manage the business using the evidence they had within the financial ledgers" explained Paul, "without having to get embroiled with what the trading components of the system does. We also needed a system that allowed us to sell in a flexible way and support the trading mechanisms we were using at the time. Our third 'must have' was stock control. Before K8 was introduced we hadn't operated any form of stock control and, as a consequence, were unable to measure stock losses, gains or damages in a reliable way. As with all merchant businesses, an accurate stock figure is a must. If the system says we have 10, we need to rely on it being right. This is crucial when you trade online and have to supply the next day.

## Case Study

# Howarth Timber



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- Paul Cornford, Systems Manager, **Howarth Timber**



We use 'suggested ordering' which is driven from demand and our core stock requirements to ensure we have just the right amount of stock to service our customers."

Howarth Timber has recently upgraded to K8 Babbage, the latest version of the software. Paul explained, "What drove us to upgrade was the extra functionality it delivered. We were able to significantly reduce collateral systems we were using around EDI; extend into online trading - which we have now done; and it gave us the 24/7 operation we needed for online trading by shrinking the overnight black out period from many hours to just 45 minutes - although as far as customers are concerned the online platform appears available all the time."

As Howarth Timber's business has developed, the data mining functionality within K8 has enabled the team to analyse and compare branch performance 'in almost pathological detail'. So, whatever the higher performing branches are doing well, can be identified and subsequently replicated across the company. Paul believes a key benefit of mirroring best practice in this way is how it has enabled the business to offer a more consistent approach to customers - and in particular to establish omni-channel pricing. "We looked at the data gathered in K8 to examine our pricing policies. We all know the building materials supply industry is based on relationships and has to be flexible when needs must. But there's a lot to be said for being consistent where you can," he said

Howarth Timber uses a great deal of the functionality within K8. "It's an intrinsic, strategic component of our business," said Paul. "It does what we want it to do and what it says it will do - which is not always the case with software. The other good thing about KCS is that their whole function in life is to support the K8 solution. When we ask them to do something, we always get what we need".

### About Kerridge Commercial Systems (KCS)

We provide specialist software, services and support to deliver fully integrated trading and business management solutions to distributive trades customers, large and small - wherever they are in the world. Immersed in the distributive trades for over 35 years, our technical experts are thought leaders in trading and management technology, and our innovative and flexible approach ensures our customers partner with us for the long-term.

Our mission is simple: to design and deliver high performance, integrated ERP solutions that enable our distributive trade customers to source effectively, stock efficiently, sell profitably and service competitively.

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