ALLIED BAKERIES

How Allied Bakeries discovered assyst, the perfect IT recipe

With computers now an essential ingredient in the making of Britain's daily bread, the country's top baker needs IT support that is … well … upper crust.

www.alliedbakeries.co.uk
Industry Sector:
Manufacturing

Benefits

- Increased visibility of IT infrastructure

- Introduction of integrated Change Management

- Monitoring of hardware maintenance leading to reduced costs

- SLAs can be effectively monitored leading to better value

- Compilation of Key Performance Indicators for effective Trend Analysis

- Improved communication resulting in increased staff satisfaction

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That is why Allied Bakeries selected award-winning assyst by Axios Systems as its IT Service Management (ITSM) solution.

Each morning, thousands of supermarkets and shops throughout the UK send their orders electronically to the company's IT center in Liverpool. Each week, its computers centrally process a large batch of orders, deciding which of its 13 major bakeries is best placed to produce the goods that afternoon so they can be sold the following morning.

Allied Bakeries, one of the country's top EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) users, delivers to 16,000 stores once, and sometimes twice, daily.

"When you think of bread, you think of baking, but half of our business is logistics and computers. We needed an ITSM solution to underpin this, which is why we made the move to assyst," says Head of IT Infrastructure, Dave Rowland.

Computers are not only becoming more important in the Allied Bakeries' production processes, guaranteeing even higher and more consistent quality, but they are also adding technological bite to its distribution network.

Its fleet of 1,000 delivery vans are equipped with state-of-the-art telemetry, including global positioning satellites that pinpoint where they are at any given moment in time. Drivers use hand-held PCs loaded with order details to show them what and where to drop off, and can print out delivery notes in order to scan them as proof of delivery.

Faced with the need to become even more productive and efficient, the company decided to upgrade its IT Help Desk tool with an integrated ITSM solution. This helped ensure problems were identified and fixed rapidly, and that changes caused minimal disruption.

Axios SYSTEMS

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> Head of IT Infrastructure

The Company

Allied Bakeries commands one-third of the UK's bread market, baking some of Britain's most popular brands such as Kingsmill, Allinson and Sunblest. It also provides a wide range of morning goods, rolls and partbaked bread for bake-off in retail stores.

Its products are delivered to a myriad of outlets, ranging from major grocers to corner shops. The company, founded in 1935 by the Weston family, has more than 20 operating sites in the UK, spread from Cornwall to Dundee.

It is part of the Associated British Foods plc (ABF), an international food, ingredients and retail group with annual sales of £4.9 billion ($9 billion) and 35,000 employees. ABF is one of Europe's largest food companies and has significant business in Australasia and the USA. Its other brands include Ovaltine, Mazola cooking oil, Twinings teas, Ryvita crispbread and Silver Spoon sugar.

The Shared Service Center in Netherton, Liverpool, operates 24 hours-a-day, seven days-a-week for Allied Bakeries. Calls are handled by a Service Desk which can forward them to a round-the-clock operations group of first-line technical support staff or to second and third-line specialists.

The Problem

The Liverpool IT center is responsible for the Allied Bakeries infrastructure, and therefore supports one of the biggest bread distribution networks in Europe.

The company's existing Help Desk tool was found to be unsatisfactory in terms of functionality and a lack of management information. It did not have an integrated Change Management module, which the management team considered a priority.

"The existing Help Desk only handled Incidents, and we had a separate asset database which we wanted all staff to see as well. We were keen to introduce Change Management and integrate all three of these components. These were the main business drivers," Rowland says.

"We had no Change Management at all and no visibility of changes - no control of what was going on," adds Rasool Hashmi, Technical Administration Manager. A manual change system was put in place temporarily. But, since this was based largely on paper forms, information was not widely available to staff - and visibility was crucial. Incidents were logged against people, not against assets, and there was no call history.

"[An extensive asset database had been developed in-house as a stand-alone facility], but, we were looking for a flexible system which encompassed all of our activities and tied them to Asset Management," Hashmi continues. "The database was somewhat limited in its ability to meet the demands put in place by the business. The activities were rather disjointed and offered very little automation."

Building bridges between the existing Help Desk system and the in-house asset database was cumbersome and it was determined that it was not an ideal solution for Allied Bakeries.

"The problems made it difficult to work out external contractors' obligations," adds Hashmi, who has more than 15 years experience with Allied Bakeries.

The Solution

When Dave Rowland joined Allied Bakeries from another senior IT role with a leading automotive parts manufacturer, it did not take him long to realize that a new integrated IT Service Management solution was essential.

He chose Axios Systems because its product, assyst, was already successfully in use at two of Allied Bakeries' sister companies, while it also had been voted the UK's top ITSM software vendor three times in a row by the Help Desk Institute (HDI).

The award-winning solution went live in Liverpool, first with Incident Management and then with Asset Management.

"In light of what had happened before, when we implemented assyst, we made it very simple to use," Rowland says. In addition to Allied Bakeries' Liverpool Shared Service Center, assyst is also used at the company's head office in Staines and by field support IT analysts who work at various sites throughout the UK.

According to Rowland and Hashmi, the new solution rapidly yielded huge benefits for the company and its staff.

Monitoring of external hardware maintenance contractors has improved radically. Rowland estimates that the annual cost of one major third-party maintenance contract was trimmed by 10 percent attributed to the system's ability to identify obsolete equipment which no longer needed to be covered.

"The new system has definitely been useful in getting better value out of third-party contractors because information is more readily available," Hashmi says. He adds, "Previously, when we were going out to tender for a PC maintenance contract, we had to rely on a manual record which in itself was a very big exercise - and then we had to monitor it from month-to-month. Now, we can verify our service provider's details, while the Service Level Agreements can be monitored against our records."

"Realistically, we would not have been able to do that without assyst because we did not have any maintenance records before," Rowland adds.

Attention can be drawn to an asset or group of assets that have caused particular problems, allowing IT management to work out the true Total Cost of Ownership.

Buying a more expensive PC with a longer warranty can be more cost-effective in the long run than purchasing a model which initially costs less, because maintenance and other support charges are lower.

"The assyst solution has acted as the key enabler for sustained annual six figure financial savings by the ability to track assets, their specification and suitability for re-use."

"assyst was the first choice of all of the stakeholders - a unanimous decision."

"Overall, we enjoy far greater visibility," Hashmi states. "A broad cross-section of staff is able to make changes and suggestions for policies and procedures, and select assets based on performance. We can also demonstrate the potential cost savings." For example, the Service Desk now knows which desktop PCs are covered by warranty and therefore, the company does not pay unnecessary costs for repairs. Contract information is stored in the system so the staff knows the details and when they are due for renewal.

Incidents are linked to assets as well as users, so a history of each asset can be built. "The key to effective Incident Management is that we can now log the call properly by logging it against the asset as well as the user," Rowland says. "When the call is logged the Service Desk not only has the user's details, but also all the machine details, including what software it contains."

Further cost savings are achieved because assyst keeps track of software installed on computers and ensures that the company does not buy more licenses than it needs.

Another major advantage of assyst is the compilation of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) including the monitoring of Service Level Agreements (SLAs). "The business wants to see what is happening, acknowledge trends and get a sense of whether things are working properly," Rowland comments. assyst offers a number of graphical reports, including key data such as Calls by Asset Type and Third-party. These reports go to the senior management team, while a sub-set is sent to the board members. "There is a lot more visibility into the kinds of problems we experience than before, therefore we can now take action accordingly," Rowland says. Trends are analyzed and management can focus on the major issues.

What about benefits for front-line IT staff?

"The biggest benefit for them is the way assyst works – it is much easier to track the calls and understand their status, whether they are about to breach an SLA or are waiting for someone to do something," Rowland says. "Before, if you assigned a call to a supplier, you did not know you had assigned it unless you went and looked at the call. There has been a tremendous improvement in efficiency." When staff logs calls, they can spot any discrepancy in the asset database and can make a correction immediately.

Status on critical issues such as main server failure is e-mailed automatically to senior managers' mobile phones via a Short Messaging System (SMS) gateway.

"The staff has taken to assyst well because it is easy to use," he adds.

Customers are happier because communication has improved; they automatically receive an e-mail when they log a call and again when the Incident has been closed.

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