

THE INSIDE SCOOP

Zepole Supply Discusses the Power Behind DDI System's Inform ERP Software for PRIDE Group Dealers

Just last year Zepole Supply turned to DDI System to make significant changes in their operational workflows. Zepole sought a solution that would help drive business operations into the future, and provide more robust capabilities that delivered advanced insight into operations. Owner Gary Thiakos sat down with DDI System's Director of Marketing Jennifer Rosvally to discuss the transition, experience and what Zepole is now doing better than ever before with Inform ERP Software.

Jennifer Rosvally (DDI): Zepole Supply went live with Inform ERP just over a year ago, in April 2017. What made you seek a different solution than the software provider you were using?

Gary Thiakos (Zepole): We were pretty long overdue for a new system. We had been with Sage since 2002 and it was time to take the next step to evolve our ERP and our processes. There were just some limitations we could not overcome as we developed our path forward for where we needed Zepole to go in the future.

JR: Can you briefly describe your business for me?

GT: We distribute everything from heavy equipment to smallwares, disposables, janitorials and chemicals. We also do kitchen design, and we have an 8,000 square foot cash and carry store. We work with the public too, so we do get residential customers coming in to purchase supplies. Those customers are primarily purchasing small ware items—pots, pans, utensils, kitchen tools. We've put a lot of resources and focus on our store in recent years, it used to be more of a sample showroom. It definitely was the right move—every year we continue to grow with it.

The AutoQuotes import function made things very easy when connected to Inform ERP



PRIDE Group Dealer, Zepole Supply utilizes DDI System's Inform ERP Software to run its operations

JR: How did DDI System come to mind when it was time to take a look at ERPs?

GT: Well, we had heard the name through several buying group acquaintances of ours in TUG and PRIDE. So when it came time to shop around, they were top of mind.

JR: Were there specific features you required when evaluating a software fit for your business?

GT: There were two main things in our search we required when considering new software. First, the AutoQuotes import function—which made things very easy when connected to our ERP. The second was purchase forecasting. Our previous system

just wasn't very 'intelligent' and we felt as though there was a lot of opportunity for us to become more efficient and get a finer level of detail for our business. It was important that we saw an intelligent and intuitive forecasting module within whatever ERP we were going to go with. And DDI seemed to have that, in my opinion, pretty far above the others that we were looking at.



JR: Is there anything DDI wasn't able to provide for you?

GT: No. Not at all. In fact, I will tell you that when I began my search, I was high on getting an open source software. Initially when we started our search, I told the team, "We're only looking for open source softwares", because that's what the previous software was.

In exploring DDI more, we realized that this software already had what we needed. With Inform we didn't have to write any additional code or workflows. We had a list of 10 or 20 items that were a requirement. We handed that list over to DDI and found out "Check, DDI does it. Check, DDI can do it. Check, we can see this in DDI. Check, check, check." So we didn't have to write anything. 95%+ of what was important to us, was already there. Which told me that a) DDI knows the distribution business and b) that we're on the right track. Inform changed my whole mindset.

JR: So here we are just over a year after you implemented Inform ERP. Have you already started to see results?

GT: From the purchasing end, we have already seen dramatic results. The forecasting is what is touted and DDI has lived up to their reputation as having incredible capability in this area. I feel like we can even dig deeper into Inform and make it work even better for us—there are a lot of features we're not fully using yet, but we're very excited to in the future. Right now, we just want to become experts on the key areas we need, and then we can implement the additional features as we're ready to take on more. We didn't want to take on too much right off the bat, but as we get comfortable with certain processes, we begin looking at other features and how those features can help us—and that's something we didn't do with our previous software. We want to make sure we're utilizing the software as it's intended, because it is an investment in our company's future.

JR: Let's talk a bit about Inform eCommerce. I know that was a feature you held off on utilizing until after you had a few months under your belt. Have you gone live with your B2B portal yet?

GT: We have! Inform eCommerce went live in January of this year, and we've got about a dozen customers using it. It's awesome! We've, again, seen another incredible feature DDI brings to the table. Prior to Inform eCommerce, we hadn't even considered what was possible—like pictures and all sorts of details and accessories and substitutes; but now with the eCommerce we're always thinking about what the customer has access to and sees. We now have processes in place to continually update pictures and all the stuff—it's a totally new process within the company that developed. So yeah, we are live with the eCommerce, we're promoting it, we'd love to get more people on it.

JR: We've seen such an influx of PRIDE dealers turning to DDI within the last few months. What can you attribute that heightened awareness to?

GT: It's simply talk among what is working for people. DDI is making headway because it works for Foodservice Equipment distributors like us. The conversations people have are a reality check—that not all systems are built to accompany our type of workflows. As an owner, I can say "Here's someone who's in our world, and they've been using this system for many years, and they're happy with it." That definitely reinforced our decision.

"The 'old school' mentality, especially on the sales side, is really no longer efficient."

PRIDE was evaluating solutions for us as well. But we couldn't wait anymore; we needed something because our prior software was just not being supported and developed any further. We started our own search, and knew DDI was the right choice for us.

Since then, because of people knowing we just moved forward on our own, we get a lot of calls—a lot of people asking about DDI. There are several other PRIDE dealers that are now fully implemented with DDI—in less than a year and a half. They certainly have our attention as a group.

In fact, I just saw an email from the PRIDE Group announcing a DDI hosted webinar. PRIDE is really seeing how valuable this software is to us and they're giving DDI the opportunity to continue showcasing their capabilities to this group. So I would say, for the people that are interested in upgrading their ERP system, now is the time to explore DDI.

JR: Can you describe your transition experience? How did the data conversion go and what were some of the training highlights?

GT: Our trainers were great! They were hands-on, of course, and even available over the phone. Most of the credit goes to our head of IT, she spearheaded everything on our side. We also had a dedicated staff who was ready for the change, and not resistant. Between all, it was just a smooth process. We prepared very well. DDI helped us prepare very well. It just all came together pretty smoothly.

JR: Can you tell me a bit about how Inform's threaded CRM has improved customer relationships?

GT: That's something we just started implementing and one thing we didn't want to tackle right away, because we've never had a CRM at this company. We've now been using Inform's native CRM the past two months and we've only just begun to scratch the surface.

Our inside sales teams are using it and now we're starting to show our outside sales force what it can do. We've started some team members inputting customer touch points and personal notes—we're slowly ramping it up and they're already seeing the results.

JR: If you run into a question or require additional training, have you gotten the support you're seeking?

GT: You know, that is a great selling point for DDI. Everyone is in the US and the staff are experts in the specific feature we may have an inquiry about. So accounting training is done by someone dedicated to accounting. We talk to the same person. You're not relying on one person to be an expert on everything, which is near impossible. DDI has committed to putting the right people in the right departments. You can't talk accounting to somebody that's an amazing code writer. You just can't.

JR: Where would you like your businesses to be in the next 5 years with Inform?

GT: We definitely want CRM fully utilized. Anytime we're thinking about the future, we're thinking about what tools they need to perform at their jobs better and more efficiently. There's the mindset of people, and especially the younger people out there in the workforce, that when it comes to technology, they're much more savvy. I feel like that's where DDI helps us significantly. It's a different world, the sales process is continuously evolving, so all these tools that are available to us with Inform, I think they're going to become even more important in the future.

The 'old school' mentality, especially on the sales side, is really no longer efficient. Every company has those long-term employees that just know every detail about the businesses and the customers. They know what to do in every single situation. But what happens when those people are no longer around? They've retired or whatever it might be? Who's filling in? Who's going to know? The reality is, nobody. When you're a company of 10 employees or 15 employees, one or two people may be able to "know" the customers. But when you're 35+ and closing

in on 40 employees, that doesn't cut it anymore. The systems have to be in place. You have to have the tools, the technology has to drive, in my opinion, the knowledge, what people know, what information is there for people to readily see.

When I think about that situation, I know Zepole has taken a hard look at the investment in our talent and our business. We've done a great job in developing younger people in our company and because of DDI, that young talent can get the level of insight a seasoned veteran has.

Teams need the right information at the right time, and they'll tell you that flat out. You look at management positions today, and I can't tell you how many times, we're interviewing for sales managers, and that was a common question [the interviewee] would ask—about our system, and the level of information they have access to. Basically telling us they can't do the job we want them to do without the right tools. And DDI's Inform ERP will provide that for our business 100%.

Thank you to Gary at Zepole for providing an in-depth look at Zepole's experience with DDI System. If you would like additional information on the features and capabilities of Inform for Foodservice Equipment Distributors, please visit: ddisystem.com/fse or call 877-599-4334 ■