



A platform for growth, rolled out in record time

Howdens Joinery has developed its successful nationwide business on a core customer base of local building trade professionals, establishing close relationships through excellent service and a wide choice of high quality products. The company introduced the K8 integrated trading system to support its dynamic growth in this focused market.



Results

- Seamless roll out
- Significant stock visibility improvements
- Significant improvement in depot stock management
- Higher percentage of sales to quote conversions
- Realised efficiencies
Poised for growth

A system fit for purpose

Howdens' entrepreneurial approach has driven growth to the current turnover of £850m, with 6000 people employed across manufacturing, sourcing, logistics and trading operations. It is now the UK's leading supplier of kitchens, holding the largest range from stock at its network of over 500 depots across England and Wales.

By the end of 2008, the company's legacy trading systems had reached the limit of their capacity for further development. In choosing a replacement to support the expanding business, Howdens sought a system that would fit its specific trading profile. This is characterised by complex account sales, where product codes can 'explode' out into several components. As Howdens' Chief Information Officer David Hallett put it, "to adapt one of the major retail EPOS software packages, designed for standard products and simple transactions by cash or by credit card, would have been the devil's own job".

Kerridge Commercial Systems (KCS) was recommended to Howdens (by our partner, Oracle), as a company that could tick all the boxes. In just one demonstration of the K8 system, we were able to show how the software would perform, as standard, all the specialist functions required by Howdens and its trade customers. Time-consuming adaptations could be avoided, and the powerful K8 integration tools would allow data to be moved swiftly and efficiently into the new system. Our technical experts added value to the project through their wealth of knowledge about how the distributive trades operate. From the start, we spoke Howdens' language, understood their issues, and could meet their needs.

The challenge of a high-speed rollout

Speed was crucial, as Howdens wanted all of its depots to be converted within a year, to reduce the risks and costs of a long-drawn-out process. As David Hallett explained, "for example, when the Chancellor altered the VAT rate during our rollout, we had to do two sets of changes. Having to deal with too many issues of that kind when you are running multiple systems can hurt the business."

KCS was an ideal partner for the challenge, sharing one hundred percent Howdens' ethos of pulling together resources, from senior management down, to make things happen.

Case Study

Howdens Joinery



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- David Hallett, Chief Information Officer, [Howdens Joinery](#)

We worked closely with their training department, field management and depot staff to test and develop the system and refine the processes. So when the time came to escalate the rollout – at its peak, to 40 depots a week - Howdens had a nucleus of staff experienced in the K8 system who could pass on skills and experience to their colleagues in other depots. KCS became so much part of the team that David Hallett described us as “going native” – a vote of confidence in the way our people were integrating into the effort.

Such a rapid introduction was a challenge to some users, especially as Howdens' previous system had been in place for twenty years. The process was made a great deal easier because the K8 functions are essentially familiar ground for experienced staff, and accessed through a naturally intuitive interface that is easy to operate, even by staff unused to computers. With continuing consultancy, support and training from KCS experts, complete adaptation was soon achieved.

Benefits across the business

One of the biggest tests for the K8 system at Howdens was giving individual depot managers freedom to make their own choices. David Hallett is pleased with the way it's worked out. “The flexibility of K8 plays to our culture, where managers are encouraged to be entrepreneurial and individual depots have a lot of autonomy.”

The operational benefits became immediately apparent, with significant improvements in stock visibility and the depot stock replenishment process. K8 also provides a much better basis for quote management, and converting quotes to sales. It delivers the robust, efficient system that Howdens needs to sustain its own performance, and to help its trade customers sell, design, install and complete their contracts more quickly and profitably.

Since K8 was introduced, the company has added more than 10% to its depot portfolio and turnover. Trading systems no longer pose a limitation to its growth. That, for Howdens, is the number one benefit of having made the change.

Highlights

- All the K8 functions are essentially familiar to staff, and its intuitive user interface made the process of familiarisation easy.
- Rolled out to forty depots a week
- K8 supports not only Howdens' own business, but also its core relationships with local building contractors who make up its trade.

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.

Contact Kerridge Commercial Systems

UK +44 (0) 1488 662 000

Ireland +353 (0)1 469 3375

K8info@kerridgecs.com

www.kerridgecs.com