

MainMan takes expansion in its stride with Datafile and CCS



MainMan Supplies is one of the UK's largest providers of health & safety, janitorial and packaging products, serving thousands of customers across the country. From a small turnover and six staff in 1987 to £19 million turnover, eight branches and 120 employees in 2008, MainMan Supplies has relied on Datafile for its accounting and business management systems. Thanks to experienced reseller, Clarke Computer Systems and Datafile's surprising flexibility, MainMan has been able to take expansion in its stride.

Company:	MainMan Supplies
Established:	1989
Location:	Head Office at Cradley Heath, West Midlands and seven other UK outlets
Turnover:	£19 million
Employees:	120
Products installed:	Datafile Premier
Users:	40
Live Date:	1997
Company:	Clark Computer Systems
Established:	1995
Location:	Burntwood, Staffordshire
Datafile reseller since:	1997
Number of installations:	30

In 1997, ten years into successful trading, MainMan Supplies was at a crossroads. The company was established in Cradley Heath in the West Midlands and had quickly made a name for itself in the provision of health & safety, janitorial and packaging products where prices are keen and delivery times are short.

MainMan opened a second branch in Telford that year and also started to import products from the Far East. At the time, this was a ground-breaking move which helped to fuel MainMan's success in the coming years. However, its Pegasus accounting system was letting it down.

Pegasus was unable to cope with the volumes of data and the network configuration between Head Office and the Telford branch. The system would regularly hang causing processing at the branch to come to a standstill too. System restores and rebuilds of file became more frequent and time consuming.

Robust, networked solution

To handle further business growth, MainMan knew that a more robust and reliable accounting system was needed; one that could cope with a networked environment, an increasing portfolio of products and multi-site operations. It had an existing relationship with Clarke Computer Systems (CCS) who introduced Datafile as a contender. Roy Clarke, MD at CCS, explains:

"I sold MainMan their first computer systems in the 1980s and we have worked together ever since. Datafile is highly flexible and I could see that it was a great match with MainMan's list of requirements. Little did we realise how important that flexibility was to become as MainMan expanded."

Later the same year, CCS went on to install Datafile Premier, the most

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customisable product in the Datafile suite.

The existing leased line set-up between Head Office and the Telford branch was reconfigured so that each office operated independently with a daily update to synchronise data. This successful model was extended over the years as MainMan opened another branch at Wrexham and expanded by acquisition to add outlets in Stoke-on-Trent, Canterbury, Norwich, Manchester, Swindon and Fareham.

Each branch has variations to suit its historical market and local customer preferences. For example, the Swindon branch specialises in tools, Canterbury specialises in workwear and Manchester specialises in decorating materials. The Head Office can report and enquire on any branch data.



Every product at every branch

Thanks to Datafile, MainMan can also account for stock across the entire company and at individual branches. This enables it to accurately track purchases and restock efficiently. When orders are

restock efficiently. When orders are received, enquiries can be made against the stock of any of the branches. From the customer's perspective, every product is available at every branch, allowing MainMan to showcase a huge portfolio of 7,000 items.

Roy Clarke at CCS observes: "When you're opening a new branch, it has to be up and running without a hitch from day one. Word would soon get around if it didn't. Once we'd established a successful configuration at Telford, we were able to replicate it at other branches. Every opening was stressful but we could rely on Datafile's order processing and stock control without fail."



Six of MainMan's existing eight branches were independent companies which MainMan acquired. Most used Sage or Pegasus based accounting packages, but to support its business, MainMan needed to be able to standardise stock control, enquiries and reporting at every outlet.

Working with Datafile, CCS developed a process to extract, convert and import critical data into MainMan's system. A trial conversion was made at month end and compared directly to the outlet's original accounting system. Having resolved any errors, the live conversion took place at the next month end. From the 1st of the following month, both MainMan Head Office and its new outlet would be running on the same Datafile based system.

Seamless currency transactions

The networked branch operation extends as far as MainMan's China office which sources products from the Far East, and manufactures MainMan's own brand products, the Warrior range. Multi-currency transactions are handled seamlessly within Datafile.

Initially, MainMan used Datafile for stock control and order processing, but as the business developed, CCS has brought more of Datafile's capabilities on stream.

For example, some branches have trade counters. CCS was able to tailor the Datafile system so that orders can be input at the counter and produce the customer's invoice direct from the system. Avoiding the need to re-key orders saves valuable time, reduces errors and of course, Datafile links the trade counters directly to MainMan's stock control to reconcile physical stock reports and prompt re-ordering.

As well as core accounting systems, Datafile Premier includes business management capabilities which MainMan has used increasingly over the years to run the business and support major decisions.

Integrated webshop

Working closely with Datafile and CCS, in 2007 MainMan launched an e-commerce site where customers can place orders directly over the web. Based on Datafile Web Shop, the e-commerce front-end links directly into Datafile which then handles invoicing and stock control in the normal way. Picking lists and



despatch notes are produced automatically from the Datafile system at Head Office to ensure that orders are rapidly despatched.

Many of MainMan's customers have their own product pricing and volume discounts. In fact, the special prices file in MainMan's Datafile system now contains over 300,000 entries, all of which are accessible via the customer's logon. This enables MainMan to offer customers consistent pricing whether they place orders by phone, fax, email, over the counter or over the web.

A huge amount of preparation work went into MainMan's e-commerce website; improving and expanding product descriptions, adding photos into the Datafile stock database and including technical specifications for health & safety products. Powerful search facilities enable customers to locate products they have previously bought and search for keywords in historical documents. The website is the least used ordering route at present, but MainMan knows it pays to think ahead.

Astounding flexibility

Mark Brooker, MD at MainMan Supplies summarises the company's experience with Datafile and CCS: "Like many businesses, we could never have predicted the changes we have been through over the past ten years. Datafile and CCS have seen us through every one."

"The flexibility of the system is astounding," Brooker continues. "We don't have to work around Datafile; it works around us which makes us faster and more efficient. That adds up to cost savings which help keep our prices competitive, and great levels of service which our customers expect."

"We're planning more acquisitions and branch openings in the coming months and it's great to be able to approach them with confidence. MainMan certainly wouldn't be the market leading company it is today without Datafile and CCS," Brooker concludes.