Fern-Howard, Ltd.

MANAGE:Enterprise™ Enables UK Lighting Company to Take "Time In A Box" Concept to Global Marketplace

Fern-Howard made its name in the United Kingdom with its quality range of energy-efficient light fittings built around the 2D fluorescent lamp. Then in 1997, they introduced Time In A Box, an entirely new concept to the lighting industry.

Next, they introduced the TaskLight, a very successful portable hand-light that pushed their line of products into the global marketplace. After that, Fern-Howard's business began to move at light-speed.

To face the challenges accompanying their successes, they needed access to more information in a much more timely manner than ever before. And that led them to Cincom's resource planning solution, MANAGE:Enterprise.

"I do know our sales and production volumes have increased by approximately 30 percent. Without MANAGE:Enterprise, we would have been struggling to cope with that."

— Roger Wearn, Finance Director

Sales Explosion Demands a New Look at Production Processes

The Minimax was the first product that Fern-Howard brought to market as a startup in 1988. It became the fixture of choice for a very healthy wholesale market throughout the United Kingdom. Its continued popularity and Fern-Howard's commitment to providing quality service allowed them to enjoy profitable sales growth that exceeded 20 percent per annum compounded.

Fern-Howard, like everyone else in the lighting industry, had always assembled the product in its final form before sending it to the customer. The customer (usually a contractor) then had to take it apart in order to customize the installation.

In 1997, Fern-Howard developed a novel approach to fixing the process. They began to market a new product, one that was assembled in a box without being screwed together. The product was also positioned in a sequence that allowed the installer to remove the various elements from the box in the order that he or she wanted to install it (usually based upon particulars about the custom installation). They called the process "Time In A Box."

This very simple concept proved to be an incredible success with installers and Fern-Howard found itself scrambling to keep up with demand. They had to move from being an organization that was inherently sales and marketing driven (they relied heavily on subcontractors to do product assembly) to one that concerned itself with all the intricacies of ramping up production to meet the new sales demand.

"We were actually operating more as a warehousing function and supplying products to our customers from stocks of finished goods which we were holding," says Fern-Howard Finance Director, Roger Wearn.

The task of revamping a successful business is not without pain, and yet, incorporating MANAGE:Enterprise into their plan for success made the transition palatable. Reports Wearn, "During the first six months of actually using MANAGE:Enterprise, we had to come to grips with the scale of the software and of understanding what could be achieved with it. Though it is difficult to establish specific gains, I do know our sales and production volumes have increased by approximately 30 percent. Without MANAGE:Enterprise, we would have been struggling to cope with that."

MANAGE:Enterprise Provides the Tools Needed for Manufacturing

Because Fern-Howard's strong suit had always been sales, its staff was not well-trained in the disciplines of assembly procedures. "This made learning [the new system] doubly hard for us," said Wearn. "Although we made a few mistakes along the way, MANAGE:Enterprise is very forgiving. We are still learning what the system is capable of and we're learning to make full use of its power."

The software's power and its flexibility attracted Fern-Howard to Cincom's ERP product. With Cincom's MANAGE:Enterprise, they can examine stock levels and ensure that they are maintained at the most effective level for production and finance purposes. It allows simple trace ability from a customer sales order through production, dispatch, and invoicing and final payment, giving Fern-Howard a superb audit trail. It also provides triggers to inform them of events as they occur rather than relying on people's memories.

"The reason for introducing MANAGE:Enterprise was to ensure that we had a system which is capable of taking us forward for the next 10 to 15 years. It is going to be at the forefront of our company over that time. Every project we undertake will be coordinated using the capacity of the system."

— Roger Wearn, Finance Director

Fern-Howard is already adapting MANAGE:Enterprise to generate information which sales, production, and accounts personnel can retrieve simply and in a format which is pertinent to each department. However, the real value still lies ahead.

"Our expectations to date have been achieved but we are working toward a total solution for our company's needs," says Wearn. "The reason for introducing MANAGE:Enterprise was to ensure that we had a system which is capable of taking us forward for the next 10 to 15 years. It is going to be at the forefront of our company over that time. Every project we undertake will be coordinated using the capacity of the system."

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FORM ME000229-2 06/00
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