



## BRISTAN UPGRADES CUSTOMER SERVICE TO NEW LEVELS OF EXCELLENCE WITH IFS APPLICATIONS

**Bristan Group has benefited from an integrated business management solution since it implemented an early version of IFS Applications back in 2003. The original solution enabled the kitchen and bathroom products group to streamline its despatch operations and meet a growing volume of EDI (Electronic Data Interchange) transactions. In order to meet the business's evolving needs, Bristan Group has recently upgraded to IFS Applications 7.5, embracing a new host of core functionalities and taking its customer service to the next level.**

Bristan Group is a dynamic business which prides itself on developing products which meet the needs of the modern installer and consumer and has an impressive track record for sales order performance: Bristan Group guarantees same-day despatch for customers placing orders between 8:00am and 6:00pm. Stock control and management is vital to this operation, as is the speed of transaction – recording the order and getting it through to the warehouse. So, while lead times for new stock can be up to two months, Bristan Group's customer delivery commitments are affected on an hourly basis, therefore stock control and purchasing are critical processes.

### THE CHALLENGE: INCREASING VOLUME OF TRANSACTIONS

“Putting the same-day despatch commitment into action has always been hugely challenging,” says Bristan Group's CFO Lance Gillett. “As the business grew we consolidated a number of operations and brands; the facilities and systems that previously operated reliably started to reach a point where sheer volume of transactions and operational complexity outstripped their capacity. We needed to revamp Bristan's IT systems in order to guarantee the success of our business model. Key criteria in selecting new systems were longevity and total cost of ownership. We intended for the relationship with our chosen provider to be a long-term one, so picking the right partner was essential to us.”

While a text-based order processing system had served the company successfully before the business's brand consolidations, sales turnover had subsequently increased from £3 million to more than £60 million and the legacy system was no longer fit for purpose. Gillett explains: “While the order processing system met our basic needs, operating this in conjunction with a dedicated accounts package and a variety of bespoke Lotus Notes-based databases meant we had multiple interfaces that were becoming hard to manage. Management information was limited and, to be fair, we were processing a far higher volume than the system was ever designed to handle. After reviewing our requirements we decided to replace our IT with a single unified system.”

Using an independent advisor, Bristan Group invited five shortlisted providers to tender and in due course IFS was selected to implement its ERP application, IFS Applications.

### ABOUT BRISTAN GROUP

Bristan Group is the parent company for two of the UK's largest bathroom brands: Bristan, which is a leading supplier of taps, showers and accessories, and Heritage Bathrooms, which specialises in exclusive quality bathroom suites. Products are designed, developed and distributed from the company's headquarters in Tamworth, Staffordshire. Sales to end-user customers are normally through builders' merchants, DIY chains and independent specialist retail outlets.



## THE IMPLEMENTATION

The original contract for an ERP solution covering 205 users was signed in December 2003. While most of Bristan Group's procedures were able to slot into generic IFS modules, some modifications were made to suit business-specific requirements, such as the use of barcode scanning for verifying customer orders on despatch. This facility had been developed under the previous system and Bristan Group wanted to carry this over to the new system with some further improvements. Another important modification was a tailored collections and returns function. This required a bespoke architecture that would allow a consignment to be allocated to various status reports throughout its lifecycle. Control of returns is very important to Bristan Group: "If you haven't got the returns policy and management right, it can be very costly. We didn't have this facility on our previous system and it was one of the things we were doing on Lotus Notes," commented Gillett.

## BENEFITS

The first phase of the system, core IFS Applications, went live during July 2004. One of the most immediate changes was the move to a paperless system within the head office building, enabling users to check the status and track the progress of orders from any terminal in the network. Following the implementation, orders could be verified at final despatch, and a packing note could be automatically printed to accompany each consignment.

"A key characteristic of our business is a high level of transactions for relatively small values. We despatch about two thousand orders a day, so to us speed is vital. Paperless order processing is fundamental to improving convenience and efficiency. The additional payback is in eliminating errors and speeding up the process," explained Gillett.

Although prior to the IFS implementation Bristan Group had been dealing with several major customers through EDI, the previous IT system could only run once a day. Following the implementation of IFS Applications, this facility could run continuously, providing a major competitive advantage in enabling Bristan to offer same day despatch. Bristan Group has since built on this by encouraging customers to use EDI ordering.

## CONSOLIDATING GROWTH

In 2003, Wes Mason joined Bristan Group as IT Services Manager, and he could see both the existing and potential benefits of the company's ERP solution: "It was immediately clear to me that IFS Applications was enabling Bristan to continue its expansion and achieve our targets, and that we could also maximise our use of the solution to further improve business efficiency."

Over the next five years Bristan Group exploited the benefits of IFS Applications, extending the core system into additional areas of functionality. A project to introduce a CRM (Customer Relations Management) system was successfully completed, and IFS also worked alongside Bristan to develop improved information services for suppliers, including web-based delivery schedules.

In 2009, following a period of further growth which saw Bristan Group increase sales turnover to £80m and employ a further 100 staff, the company evaluated its technology infrastructure to ensure its potential was being fully

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Wes Mason, IT Services Manager  
Bristan Group



maximised. Bristan had been impressed with IFS Applications, as well as with the first-response maintenance it provided for the underlying Oracle database. But by 2009 the database was no longer supported and Bristan Group was keen to retain a supported environment. Bristan Group was also motivated to reassess its ERP solution because it recognised that IFS had been significantly developing its product portfolio: “Whilst as a Group we had been busy consolidating our brands and developing tried and tested methods of delivering successful results using the IFS suite of applications, IFS hadn’t stood still and had continued to develop its offerings. We evaluated version 7.5 of IFS Applications and were impressed with the improved functionality and user-friendly interface that it offered.”

Bristan Group subsequently took the decision to upgrade to IFS Applications 7.5 and a contract covering 400 users (double the number of users written into the 2003 agreement) was signed in mid-2009. Implementation over three UK sites was completed on schedule over the next eight months, reaching completion in early 2010. The upgrade has seen a host of new functionality become available to the company.

#### **NEW FUNCTIONALITY: THE POSSIBILITIES OF IFS APPLICATIONS 7.5**

Mason explains that Bristan Group is now exploring the full possibilities of IFS Applications 7.5, including the new Customer 360 Degree View functionality, which he cites as a key benefit of the upgrade. This new browsing window provides a complete view of all customer activity on one screen, including orders, support calls, invoicing, service requests, finance data and quotes. “In order to remain commercially competitive, we must continuously improve our customer service, responsiveness and reliability, so we depend on flexible solutions both technically and functionally speaking,” he said. “The 360 Degree function puts all the information we could need about a customer right at our fingertips, enabling us to be more proactive with the customer when we are liaising with them.”

Additionally, Mason cites the improved flexibility of IFS Applications 7.5 as an ongoing benefit for Bristan Group: “Following the upgrade, we have explored additional functionality and we are now enjoying the benefit of making changes more easily ourselves. For instance, the new ‘custom events’ feature enables us to create alerts or force actions when certain values are detected within the system: so if one part of the suite identifies stock levels are reaching a critical point, the system can automatically trigger reorders. Because we can develop these custom events ourselves, it not only reduces maintenance costs and improves cost efficiency, but also empowers Bristan to improve workflow and user efficiency internally. Ultimately, this enables Bristan to maintain its strict customer despatch commitments and analyse our ordering process competency more closely.”

Wes Mason concludes, “Because of our positive experiences with IFS, we were comfortable rolling the solution out to a wider user base and it has proved easy to get to grips with at all levels. The IFS infrastructure has underpinned, and will continue to support, our long-term plans for growth. Both implementations have been challenging but IFS has delivered both on time and, although we tested the IFS support team to the extreme, they were able to deliver the right expertise and response throughout both projects.”

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#### **BENEFITS**

- 360 Degree View functionality consolidates all information on a customer in one place
- More proactive with customers
- Greater flexibility in creating custom events and alerts
- Reduced maintenance costs and improved cost efficiency
- Improved user productivity

