



## DRINKS MANUFACTURER ICB GIVES ITSELF ROOM TO GROW WITH IFS APPLICATIONS™

**Intercontinental Brands (ICB), a credible alternative to market leaders in the alcoholic drinks industry, produces 20 million bottles every year at its plant in Middlesbrough. Shipping to countries as diverse as Germany, Nigeria and Hong Kong, the company's first aim was to establish a single version of the truth by ripping out and replacing a number of disparate, ageing systems. Its investment in IFS Applications has given it room to grow, dispensing with the spreadsheets and filing cabinets for good.**

### THE PROBLEM

ICB's operations were managed by an unintegrated mishmash of computer systems, with hundreds of thousands of spreadsheets and paper bulging from 150 different filing cabinets.

"We relied on a bunch of disparate systems that couldn't communicate properly with each other, and something we refer to as 'cig packet technology'—we literally wrote things down on the backs of cigarette packets," says Matthew Brown, the IT Manager at ICB, who spearheaded the IFS implementation. "This fragmented combination meant knowledge of business processes rested with individuals rather than being shared or documented, often making the correct course of action unclear and challenging. It also meant lots of time and energy was being wasted on trying to gather data in the first place, rather than analyzing it to work out what was best for the company moving forward."

A disjointed approach made it nigh-on impossible for ICB to assess KPIs accurately and in a time-efficient manner. Without accurate reporting facilities, the company was effectively driving blind, lacking the knowledge to improve efficiency, drive lower costs, and streamline processes.

### THE SOLUTION

The closest thing ICB had to an ERP system was something called Merlin, which was partially implemented nine years ago. "It was poorly fitted to our organization and we received limited support from the provider," says Brown. "It looked a lot like a video game from the 80s, which is certainly not appropriate for a fast-growing 21<sup>st</sup> century business."

In early 2012 the company decided it was time to put a more robust, flexible solution in place. After looking at a number of products, ICB chose to implement IFS Applications 8.

"We were clear from the beginning that we didn't want to modify a product to fit us, but wanted to find a product that would slot seamlessly into the business with minimal fuss," says Brown. "We were also keen to create a lasting partnership with our new ERP provider."

One of the first things they did was speak to a well-known Scottish drinks manufacturer that had recently experienced a successful rollout of IFS. A business trip to their site in Scotland swung the balance, says Brown. "First and foremost, the visit

### ABOUT ICB

Established in 1990, ICB has grown quickly and now supplies alcoholic drinks to most of the UK's leading supermarkets, convenience chains and wholesalers, as well as to a number of export markets. ICB has a long established track record in bottling and packaging for its major customers including, Tesco, Sainsbury, M&S, Iceland and Beam Global and has in recent years invested heavily in its production capacity, packaging flexibility and information technology such that it may now offer its potential customers packaging options which include glass, PET and bag-in-box.



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justified our decision to fix our problems in the first place, as the reference customer was seeing such benefits. They were singing IFS's praises and that definitely helped us make up our minds."

"Two of the most important challenges we faced were how to accurately report our excise duty liability in a way that removes human error, and managing and analyzing our promotional and advertising spend. Knowing that our peers had found a solution through IFS helped us feel more secure in the knowledge that the new system could fulfill our requirements."

## THE IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation began in earnest in December 2012, with server infrastructure put in place. Brown also set up a test version of IFS Applications 8, and he and his team used IFS's online resources and eLearning guides to get to grips with it. This meant that by the time go-live came around, ICB could hit the road running.

Brown continues, "Implementing IFS at ICB was not just about putting in a new ERP system—it was an opportunity for wholesale business change, a chance for us to look at things in a different light and look in corners that had been left untouched for years."

Sarah King, PMO analyst, adds, "ICB is an ever-changing business and we wanted a solution that would enable us to grow and develop flexibly to keep up with the market. Furthermore, as a company majority owned by private equity, the legacy system would have been unwieldy to a buyer, and the data required for analysis would have been too difficult to acquire."

In August 2013, ICB successfully went live with IFS Applications and achieved its first goal of implementing a completely mod-free solution that fit the business's needs out of the box.

## THE RESULTS

One of the most impressive business benefits has been seen in ICB's technical department, which blends and tests new drinks recipes before signing them off to be bottled. Traceability and control are imperative to its operation, and IFS has revolutionized the way it works.

"Through IFS, the lab has had its inventory cataloged and barcoded for the first time," says King. "They used to do weekly stock takes, but they now have full visibility of what stock they have on hand at any given moment. Many of the technical department's processes have moved from pen and paper to a single system, so for the first time all our data is stored in one easy-to-access location, making us infinitely more auditable."

"The technical manager did a traceability exercise a couple of weeks ago, using IFS to trace a bottle burst back to the entire batch of glass and back through to all of the shop orders that had used it. This meant that they could locate and notify all affected customers quickly, easily and independently."

Brown says the company has satisfied all of its reasons for implementing IFS, including increased data visibility and a single version of the truth, more flexibility for individual users and better traceability throughout the business. "We're using best business practice now. The lab is rotating stock and keeping digital records of everything in one location, and we have the infrastructure in place to enable us to introduce stricter policies and procedures."

"Purchase orders used to be a big challenge, for example; we used paper order books in some departments, system-generated in others, and some people just made order numbers up as they went along. Now, we have a single procedure in place that everyone can follow."

ICB's first phase of implementation included IFS components for financials, manufacturing, supply chain, quality management and CRM. The company has now started looking at IFS solutions for new product development, marketing and capital expenditure.

## BENEFITS

- Fits business needs without any modifications
- Full traceability
- Increased data visibility
- A single version of the truth
- Greater flexibility for users



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Matthew Brown, IT Manager, ICB



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