

Customer case studies

Hall's Floorings

Hall's Floorings is a UK distributor of floor coverings. Formed in 1948, it is still owned by the Hall family. Hall's Floorings is headquartered in Edmonton, North London. Today, it's a 91-employee firm with a turnover approaching £15 million per annum.

"In the space of four years, the business has progressed beyond recognition. You wouldn't even recognise this operation now. Our business has been totally transformed"

John Wade
Financial Director



Industry	Distribution
Geographic	London
Employees	91
Turnover	£10-15m
Solution	Access Supply Chain
Modules	Core ledgers Sales order processing & invoicing Purchase order processing Bill of materials Stock control Location & lot control EDI API

Expanding business

Financial Director John Wade began the search for new software to support the central business processes of sales order processing, purchase orders and stock control. He explains why, "Our existing system had been in place for 20 years. It ran on a Unix platform and was originally written for a carpet wholesaler, so it was highly bespoke.

The system's authors were approaching retirement age, and this meant that the software's shelf life was limited." So John took the opportunity to look at other packages. There were several key criteria that any new system would need to meet, not least of which was the fact that Hall's had plans to implement a specialist warehouse system in the near future, so the ability to integrate would be vital.

"Our warehouse was entirely paper based. We'd seen a warehouse system at another similar firm, which enabled the paper element to be removed entirely. The orders were being fed through directly from order processing to the cutting tables," says John.

"Ultimately, we knew that would be our goal, but it was impossible with the platform we had, plus we knew it wasn't worth investing in our existing software to make it compatible, given the uncertainty attached to its lifespan. But this meant that we had to find a solid sales order processing system with enough flexibility to enable this future integration."

A total system solution

Hall's Floorings evaluated several systems and narrowed it down to two. "Access won the day because we could see they had the all-round

capability to be a good service provider. We knew that this was going to be a huge upheaval for us - we were kicking out our hardware and our software, both of which had been well established for many years. The Access software was the right choice in terms of functionality and, importantly, we were confident that it could integrate easily with our accounts package and with the proposed specialist warehousing software."

The modular nature of the Access software was vital for Hall's Floorings in terms of maximising the system's flexibility. It sells packs of laminate flooring in a typical unit cost way and so, combined with the roll stock products, it was vital that the solution could accommodate different sizing methods.

Access was also able to customise the software to meet the precise needs of the roll stock operation. "The key thing for us is that we buy and sell in square metres," says John. "It's this roll stock issue that was the hardest thing to solve; it's something that most other systems just cannot deal with. It's not very complex but you do need flexible software to allow you to work with all those elements."

Access enhanced the software. "This enabled us to do multi-cut entry on a single order, which would then allocate that order to the appropriate roll. That in itself was quite a complex modification - few companies could have done this for us and Access managed it within the timeframe."

He explains, "If you're ordering two or three cuts - say, for hall, stairs and landing areas - you need some sort of batch control. Unless instructed differently, our system now selects all the multi-cuts from the same roll, so maintaining the batch integrity.

Previously, those cuts would have had to be entered individually and manually allocated to a roll - now, the Access system does this automatically."

The implementation took almost a year to complete. John says it was difficult for Hall's - not because of the software, but because of the scale of change the business was undergoing at the time. "Without doubt, it was the hardest thing we've ever done here," says John.

"The system, in fact, is incredibly easy to use, but at the time we were changing everything - the software, the hardware - so it was always going to be a tough exercise. What's important, though, is how easy Access has been to use. A good way to gauge this is how quickly new sales staff take to it: they are always up to speed within a couple of weeks or so."

Seamless integration

The long-awaited specialist warehouse system has now been implemented and, as John anticipated, it integrates seamlessly with the Access software. The warehouse is 60,000sq ft and extends to 11.5m-high racking in one area. At goods-in, each roll is given a card, with a unique number, and is then put into the racking at the appropriate aisle and height.

"Now, as soon as an order is taken, the details appear on pick screens on the forklift trucks and they pick the product and take the roll to the cutting table area." The roll card is scanned and the number of cuts to be taken from that roll is displayed on a PC, sited on the cutting machine. "All the operator has to do is press a button and the dimensions are transferred to the cutting table measurement machine. The cuts are taken and a packing note produced for each."

The warehouse system may be third-party but John is convinced that the Access software underpins the success of this operation. "The beauty of this is in the integration. We could see Access had the capability to allow us to link sales orders to the cutting table controls. This meant, in effect, we could have a tried and tested flooring-specific warehouse system."

John adds, "Our order accuracy now is fantastic - the credit note ratio halved immediately. Without Access, we wouldn't have been able to install this warehouse system. With the sales office and stock control functionality running smoothly, we can really offer a proactive service to our customers."

In the space of four years, the business has progressed beyond recognition. "You wouldn't even recognise this operation now," says John. "Our business has been totally transformed."

Future plans

Hall's is now in the process of implementing Access's electronic data interface (EDI) module - something that would have been impossible before. And new products are on the horizon, including the launch of a chalk-composite tile, with a non-slip surface, which can be cut with a knife. What's more, although the retailers order by phone, John says that Hall's may look to establish an online ordering facility in future - with flexible software supporting the business, the possibilities are there for new products, services and processes.

Access has played a crucial part in helping Hall's Floorings to transform itself into a successful 21st century distributor. And with sophisticated technology backing up its quality product and service offering, Hall's is definitely on a roll.

Further information

For further information on this, or any other Access case studies, please telephone us on 01206 322575, email case-studies@theaccessgroup.com or, alternatively, visit www.theaccessgroup.com/downloads/case-studies.aspx