Sage to Datafile transfer proves a wise decision for BCW Agriculture

Facing the withdrawal of its accounting system, Sage Line 100, in 2007 agricultural supplier BCW Agriculture decides that the recommended upgrade will not fully support its business. Reseller, Antar Information Technology, recommends the Datafile Premier management information and accounting system. BCW's wise decision results in a highly flexible system with powerful reporting and enquiry facilities, as well as a solution for automating its hazardous waste documentation.

Company:	BCW Agriculture
Established:	1991
Location:	Market Drayton, Shropshire
Employees:	22
Products installed:	Datafile Premier
Users:	18
Live Date:	January 2008
Company:	Antar Information Technology
Established:	1984
Location:	Sale, Cheshire
Datafile re-seller since:	2002

The wholesome county of Shropshire is home to leading agricultural supplies firm, BCW Agriculture. The company supplies farmers all over the West Midlands with farm equipment and machinery, pesticides, fertilisers and seeds.

The company also blends grass and seed to order and in terms of its business systems, stock control and batch tracking for its 1,500 stock items are critical functions. Certain materials are classed as hazardous substances, others have shelf lives and their sources, storage requirements and transportation require constant, accurate tracking with the audit trails to prove it.

BCW Agriculture has worked with business systems specialists, Antar Information Technology, since 1996, and has used the Sage Line 100 accounting system since 1993. Knowing that Sage had decided to withdraw the product – but without confirming a date at the time - BCW called Antar in to help consider the options.

Antar Director, Ian Charters, explains: "There were a number of reasons why we were not entirely convinced that Sage's replacement for Line 100 could deliver the functionality BCW needed at the right price. For example, it could not support documentation for the transport of hazardous goods, or the range of reports and ad-hoc enquiries that BCW needed.

Powerful reporting

Ian continues, "Antar has been in the business long enough to know that one size doesn't fit all – which is why we offer a range of products.
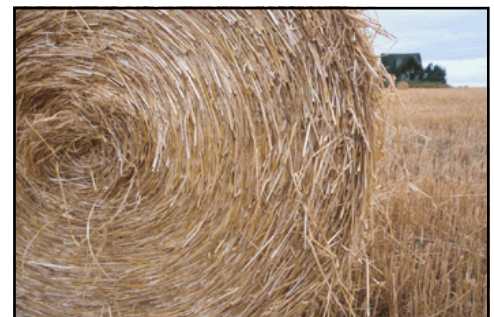
> "Datafile is very flexible and very adaptable. I think it will be a long time before we outgrow it – if we ever do."
>
> **Nigel Chesters, MD, BCW Agriculture**

We recommended Datafile to BCW because it's so flexible to configure and has very powerful reporting and enquiry facilities."

In June 2007, Antar and Datafile Software demonstrated the Datafile management information and accounting system to BCW's senior management team including MD, Nigel Chesters.

Nigel recalls the demonstration: "We could see straightaway that Datafile could be tailored to the way we work. Overall, it appeared very easy to use. The menus were clear, the navigation was straightforward and we would be able to include handling and transportation information for hazardous goods automatically as part of the despatch note. That was a major headache solved."

Antar and BCW worked closely together to prepare the existing Sage Line 100 system for transfer to Datafile Premier, the most customisable and scalable product in the four tier Datafile suite. The transfer itself had to take place in no more than one working day so that BCW's business was not interrupted.

Overnight conversion

A "stop trading" date and time was set, coinciding with a complete stock take. Product, supplier and customer information was extracted from Sage Line 100, together with the current sales and purchase ledger entries, and stock levels. Overnight, Antar converted and loaded the data using a test company shell.

BCW personnel reviewed the data the following morning to find that the conversion had gone well, but there were some anomalies. For example, the Datafile software amends stock levels as soon as the order is processed but Sage Line 100 deducts the stock level only when it leaves the building.

Quickly spotting the differences and working closely with BCW to establish their preferences, Antar scheduled a second conversion that night. Ian Charters recalls the process: "It's testament to the flexibility of Datafile that we were able to reconfigure the system quickly and make sure that stock levels and the ledgers balanced so that BCW could continue trading."

Indeed, this was crucial as BCW Agriculture neared its year end at the end of January 2008, and prepared for its busiest six months of the year between January and June. Other amendments had to wait to let BCW's staff focus on the business.

Headache solved

Datafile's customised reporting solved a major headache for BCW Agriculture – the production of hazardous transportation documentation. No such facility existed within Sage Line 100 and the documents had to be produced manually. Now, the Datafile system produces the correct paperwork alongside the despatch note, saving time and streamlining the order fulfilment process.

BCW also uses a number of tailor made reports including:

- Gross margin summary (by salesperson between selected dates).
- Sales by Product Group – including stock levels, sales in the current period and YTD.
- A suite of Sales & Profitability Reports by salesperson, product, customer and reference.

Instead of having to re-key information into a specific format, BCW has set up each report within Datafile and can produce it directly from the system, again saving valuable time.

18 months after the conversion from Sage Line 100, the Datafile Premier accounting and management information system is well bedded in at BCW Agriculture. Several routine Datafile upgrades have been successfully installed, giving BCW even greater functionality in its key area of reporting.

Reports can be automatically exported to Excel for further data manipulation, for example, and they now include live hyperlinks which enable additional detail to be viewed directly from the ledgers without having to run separate enquiries.

Nigel Chesters is pleased with the overall result. "I know we made the right decision," Nigel concludes. "We've ended up with a much better system where the level of customisation is almost overwhelming. I'd liken it to a Windows 3.1 user moving to Windows XP. It was quite a culture shock for us all.

"Datafile is very flexible and very adaptable. I think it will be a long time before we outgrow it – if we ever do," Nigel finishes.