

How Talbotts Biomass Boilers improved efficiency with better visibility across production, materials, sales and finance

Based outside Stoke-on-Trent, Talbotts Biomass Energy Systems Ltd manufacture, install and service an innovative range of biomass boiler systems. It's products consistently achieve the highest levels of energy conversion in the market, whilst diverting significant landfill waste, and helping manufacturers limit heating costs.



“You’ve suddenly got full visibility of what's going on”

Adrian Hunter, Finance Director

The Challenge

Talbotts wanted to increase productivity and have more visibility of information across the sales, manufacturing, service and finance functions, upgrading its legacy finance system in the process.

Technical Operations Manager, Ahmed Alainiah described the original working practices. *“When I joined Talbott's we were looking at data through spreadsheets, and the correct information wasn't present for us to give the right customer service and finish out projects, in a timely manner.”*

Historically the Finance team would report project margins, or problems with costs, at least a month after month-end. Adrian Hunter, Finance Director described the implications. *“I've had to do the margin reporting by contract on a very manual basis and it's very time consuming.”*

Spreadsheets and manual processes were a constant theme at Talbotts. Bills of materials and project costing was manually handled. These were difficult to track, requiring much ad hoc

internal communication to ensure accuracy. A legacy CRM system was also in play, but it lacked buy-in from the team. Finally, knowledge solely resided in people's heads.

Talbotts reliance on skilled people and inherent knowledge wasn't sustainable as the business grew and brought on new people. Talbotts are forward thinking, constantly investing in R&D and expertise to improve their offering. As demand for its products increased, it was clear new systems were necessary.

The Ideal Solution

Having joined the company, Allainiah identified that the communication and information challenges were holding the business back. It was clear that Talbotts needed a system that:

- Brought all information in to one transparent and standardised system, including Xero cloud accounting integration
- Managed the customer from enquiry to sale, build, installation and after-sales service
- Allowed for parts and bill of materials data to be standardised to avoid confusion and enable strong inventory management
- Enabled the after-sales team to drive service revenues with a clear picture of customers and deployed products
- Provided clear management and operational reports

The system also needed to be easy to use, catering for a wide range of skill levels. Cloud enablement was needed for reporting back to head office in Leicester, and engineers working in the field.

Overall it was clear that the business demanded a system that could handle the CRM and MRP elements of the process, and the search began for suitable candidates.

Making the decision

Flowlens offered a free trial, which helped Talbotts to understand the solution on offer.

"We started looking at Flowlens and it became pretty clear very quickly that the solution that Flowlens gave us was both the CRM and the stock MRP system that we lacked." said Adrian.

Ahmed added *"The Flowlens team were very efficient, professional, and eager to understand who we are, which was key, to push things forward."*

The Results

After working with the Flowlens onboarding team to import data, configure the system, integrate with Xero and train users across the business, the transformation at Talbotts speaks for itself.

The business now have a 'single view of the truth' from tracking sales and stock, to planning projects and installation. The increased visibility have improved team efficiency, reduced needless interruptions and confusion, and driven more sales. The joined up nature of the new system links sales, engineering, production, stock, finance and management, ensuring clearer communication.

Adrian comments on improvements on financial processes: *"I think from a financial perspective that the information I need to know is readily available from Flowlens.....the stock levels and the orders that are placed for that stock and against contracts are all there and very clear.....I haven't got to dig around estimating contract margins because it's all there.*

The sales activity is all there to be reported on as well as a director of a business, you've got full, suddenly got full visibility of what's going on.

Timeliness of profitability and margin information is a key outcome of the new solution. Accurate bill of materials combined with joined up quotation, order processing and job card tools mean there is confidence in the business data. This has enabled the team to focus on margin improvement and profitability of contracts.

Other administrative tasks have been simplified. For example the stock take is a "doddle" in comparison with the prior manual process. Month to month reporting on stock levels is no longer a laborious process.

Similarly, there was a very mechanical process of matching invoices to PO's. The Finance team now uses the approval controls over the purchase order being placed on Flowlens, and are matching invoices remotely, making the process faster and easier, before processing invoices through to Xero with the click of a button.

Getting the team on board

Having already identified the weaknesses in communication and maintaining accurate information, buy-in from the wider team was not a challenge. The team was well aware of time spent chasing information and performing manual tasks, and the combined CRM and MRP system workflow made it easy for people to see the benefits.

Getting management on board was also enhanced by the availability of information. Adrian elaborates *"The reporting side on Flowlens is very easy. You have a great number of reports to choose from on Flowlens. You can go into extreme detail, or kind of have just the generic reports."* Adrian Hunter

Growing Service Revenues

With significant growth prospects for its after-sales service business, having a solution that incorporated this meant Talbotts could manage everything under one roof. Every boiler leaving Talbotts has a serial number, and this can be tracked in terms of service tickets, jobs and revenues.

“The after sale service based on the products that we sell is really important for us for future growth. The boilers that we sell need that at least once or twice a year service. So we have the assets on the system, we have the automated reminders and that visibility on the service cycles is really important.” Adrian Hunter.

Follow-ups are also planned into the system to ensure that service intervals are met. This benefits customers who enjoy optimal efficiency, helping Talbotts build recurring revenues.

Saving Time and Money

Most team members report saving at least 1-2 days per week. For example as Mechanical Design Engineer, Callum Watson sits between Technical and Service teams. *“It’s saved me a lot of time, two or three hours a day. I don’t have to ask someone where to look. I can just look for it myself, and it’s fairly intuitive for me to work out where I need to get the information.”*

For Finance, the new system creates efficiencies across their business process. *“The functionality within Xero is really powerful so that the cost, and I can set costs centres and departments very easily. So from a reporting perspective, it’s a very powerful tool for what I consider to be a very low cost.” Adrian Hunter*

Whether its seamless data transfer with Xero, or more efficient purchasing of materials across multiple jobs the new joined up approach reaps benefits.

Thinking about the time this digital transformation has given back to the business, Ahmed concluded: *“Going away from the paper-based system, or the hard copy system, and putting it on a platform or a cloud, just helps everyone. You save time, save money. For management, it’s a good 20% time-saving.”*

Ahmed sums it up: *“Being able to have a centralised system where we can save specific information relevant to our business is essential for our business growth. And it’s a no brainer, to use Flowlens and Xero.”*

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