

MADE SMARTER

Apreco Air pressure control specialists making their business smarter

A manufacturer of products to regulate and control air pressure has seen its productivity improve after receiving a grant from Made Smarter to help digitise the business and have its systems completely synergised.

Apreco Ltd, based in Bishops Cleeve in Herefordshire, designs products such as air pressure stabilisers, and pressure relief vents that can regulate airflow and pressure, as well as providing a service to maintain them for their customers.

Its products are used in the healthcare industry to help keep rooms like operating theatres or isolation rooms sterile, and are also used in fire safety systems at places like oil refineries and gas storage facilities to vent flammable gas away when the pressure becomes too high.

Apreco, which employs 15 people, has been doing well, but it had four different computer systems for different parts of its business – one for accounts, one for sales, one for manufacturing, and one for data capture on the shop floor.

After discussions with Made Smarter, Apreco successfully applied for a £20,000 grant to apply for software that fully connected the four systems digitally, saving Apreco lots of time.

Production manager Sophie Fenemore said: "The new software has made us far more productive and has automated a lot of our work.

"We knew ideally what we needed to do to enhance our business but Made Smarter's expert advice along the way and its help with

the grant application made the process easy."

The Challenge

Apreco had gained a strong foothold in the healthcare and energy sectors thanks to its innovative products having several patents to their name.

Its four different systems that were not integrated with each other meant time was lost putting data from one system into another system, typically with double or even triple entry of the same data.

To really take the business to the next level, Apreco needed a smart, unified system that was consistent across all aspects of its operations.

Apreco researched possible software companies that could fulfil this brief, and came across Redditch-based firm MIE Solutions that might be able to help.

Sophie said: "We had researched MIE Solutions and felt like it might be the best company to help improve our software. By coincidence, we attended manufacturing supply chain show Subcon in 2021 and came across Made Smarter there.

"We heard about how Made Smarter can help businesses adopt the latest digital technology and earn grants to help pay for it, which piqued our interest. The timing was perfect.

"After an initial chat, we organised for Made Smarter to come and visit Apreco so we could talk through exactly what we needed."

The Solution

Martyn Mangan, Digital Transformation Specialist for Made Smarter in the Worcestershire Growth Hub area, arranged to visit Apreco alongside Steve Norgrove from Made Smarter partner WMG, at the University of Warwick.

The pair helped Apreco assess every part of its business and see whether MIE Solutions' software was the right way for it to move forward.

Managing Director Mike Hodges and Sophie were asked many questions surrounding the way Apreco was run, and what Apreco wanted to get out of using the software.

Martyn said: "We came to the conclusion that integrated software from MIE Solutions, as well as new tablets on the shop floor for ease of data entry, was the right solution for Apreco.

"With WMG we helped produce a 'digital roadmap' for Apreco, which gave Mike and Sophie a step-by-step process of how to integrate and monitor the new software.

"We then guided Apreco through the process of applying for a £20,000 match-funded grant to pay for the software and its installation. The grant application was successful, and Apreco is now in the process of installing the software across its systems."

Sophie added: "To have Martyn and Steve's expertise in helping us decide what solution was right for us was so important. Although we thought we knew what we were doing, Made Smarter helped us make an informed decision.

"Not only that, Made Smarter's help in securing grant funding for the new software was incredibly useful.

"MIE Solutions' software is now being installed across the business, and our clunky four-system way of working will soon be gone."

The Benefits

Apreco's new software has not yet been fully integrated into the company, but Mike and Sophie are very confident it will bring the results they are looking for.

Not only does the software ensure there is no duplication across the business, such as entering data twice or more across different systems, but also automates a lot of report generation which previously had to be done manually.

Sophie said: "The key thing for us is the new software will just save us so much time, which will allow us to improve lead times for our customers and our productivity too.

"For example, capturing data from the shop floor and integrating into a report will now be done seamlessly, and data from a sale should instantly be transferred to our account system too.

"In this day and age, having systems like this can be absolutely vital to stay competitive in a challenging market.

"And if the software proves as successful as we hope, it may lead us to think about expanding too.

"Receiving the grant was a massive help too – it was always going to be a large capital investment to purchase and install software like this – but Made Smarter's advice and help in securing the grant meant we had a bit of a leg-up."

The Future

Apreco is now looking forward to seeing the benefits of the new software come in and produce faster turnarounds for its customers.

Sophie added: "Made Smarter could not have come at a better time for us, and we think it has given us an edge compared to our competitors.

"Anyone in a similar position to us should go ahead and talk to Made Smarter, because what you get out of it is totally worth it.

"The consultation with them brought up ideas and considerations that we wouldn't have thought of by ourselves, so having those experts in place to help you can be very reassuring.

"We're now taking a huge step forward with our business thanks to Made Smarter's help, and we'd encourage other SMEs like ours to do the same."

Phoebe Dawson, Director of Business Engagement for the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership and Growth Hub Manager for Worcestershire Growth Hub, added: "We are really pleased to be able to support Apreco with improving their software systems through the Made Smarter programme. Made Smarter is enabling businesses across England to adopt the latest digital technologies and it is fantastic to see the benefits it is having for local businesses.

"If your organisation is based in Worcestershire and is looking for support, speak to the Worcestershire Growth Hub and our team can guide you through the support packages to ensure you find the right one to make your business can grow and succeed."

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Sophie Fenemore (Apreco Production Manager), Mike Hodges (Owner and Managing Director at Apreco) and Martyn Mangan (Made Smarter)

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CASE STUDY