# MADE SMARTER

## Orapi Maintenance UK lays the foundations for future growth through digital transformation

**A West Midlands manufacturer with more than 75 years of history has transformed the way it manages customer relationships, sales and marketing, and customer communications after investing in a new digital platform with support from Made Smarter West Midlands and WMG at the University of Warwick.**

Orapi Maintenance UK is a manufacturer of specialist chemicals and MRO consumables, and part of the Paredes Orapi Group.

It has overhauled outdated systems that were holding back growth, giving employees better access to information, improving customer service and creating a platform for future innovation.

The business, which recently relocated from Smethwick to a new facility in Wednesbury, employs 52 people and manages a portfolio of around 1,000 products.

While its expertise, technical knowledge and long-serving workforce have helped it build strong relationships with customers, leaders recognised that the company's internal systems needed to be modernised.

## Before:
### Outdated systems were holding the business back

When Orapi Maintenance UK's Head of Marketing, Matt Thomson, joined the business, one issue quickly stood out.

The company's customer relationship management (CRM) system was outdated, difficult to use and limiting what the business could achieve.

Matt said: "a CRM is the central hub for customer activity across the business. It connects sales, marketing and wider teams around a shared view of the customer, helping us manage relationships, understand opportunities and support customers more effectively. Our previous system was restrictive and had become a chore to update, which naturally limited the quality and depth of information being added.

"Customer information was spread across multiple spreadsheets; sales activity was difficult to track and there was little visibility of customer interactions across the business.

"There was no central view of account history, limited reporting capability and no effective way of identifying opportunities to introduce additional products to existing customers.

"We wanted to grow, but our internal systems were holding us back."

The challenges extended beyond efficiency because much of the knowledge about customer relationships sat with individual sales representatives rather than within the business itself.

Matt said: "If someone moved role or left the business, valuable customer history and context could become difficult to access.

"The system was also frustrating for staff to use, reducing productivity and making even basic tasks unnecessarily time-consuming.
Despite recognising the need for change, Orapi was balancing other major investments, including a move to a new site, meaning the CRM project risked being delayed.

## Turning Point:
### Finding the right solution

Determined not to postpone the project any longer, Orapi began exploring alternative CRM platforms and was introduced to the Made Smarter West Midlands Programme.

Through the programme, the company was also introduced to Manikanta Ravi, Technology Transfer Engineer at WMG, University of Warwick, one of its strategic partners who helped the team define what they needed from a modern CRM system and evaluate potential solutions.

Matt said: "We scoped the requirements, researched the market and shortlisted the CRM platforms we wanted to explore. Made Smarter then introduced us to Mani at WMG, who helped us step back and look at the bigger digital transformation picture, not just the CRM in isolation."

The company successfully secured a £14,319 grant from Made Smarter West Midlands and invested a further £14,000 of its own, including a two-year subscription.




Matt Thompson, Orapi; Manikanta Ravi, WMG; John Wood, Made Smarter West Midlands

"Without the Made Smarter grant, the project would likely have been delayed for at least another year," Matt said.

"We needed a CRM that was powerful enough to support our growth plans, but simple enough for the team to adopt and buy into. Some of the platforms we reviewed were impressive, but they risked overwhelming users. Zoho offered the right balance of functionality, usability and scalability."

## Transformation:
### Creating a more connected business

The implementation of Zoho CRM has transformed how information flows through the business.

What was once spread across spreadsheets, emails and individual employees is now held in one central system.

"The difference is night and day," Matt said. "We now have a much clearer view of contacts, activities, opportunities and account ownership across the business. Just as importantly, by bringing that data into one system, we can start building automations that reduce manual work and help teams act on information more consistently.

"Within two weeks of implementation, employees were confidently using the core modules of the system.

"The transformation has also changed the way people work. Instead of viewing CRM as an onerous task, employees are actively looking for ways to improve processes and make better use of data.

"The new system has encouraged employees to think differently about data and how technology can help them work more effectively, creating a culture of continuous improvement across the business."

The business is now using automation to simplify routine processes and improve customer service.

For example, products that require customer identification checks can now trigger automatic reminders rather than relying on manual follow-ups.
Alongside the CRM project, Orapi has started exploring more advanced uses of digital technology, including artificial intelligence.

The company has begun integrating AI into lead generation activities and has worked with Made Smarter and WMG to build internal skills and capability.

Mani added: "Our engagement did not stop at system implementation. During our collaboration, we identified a strong interest from the leadership team in adopting AI technologies, but there was a clear skills gap within the organisation.

"Through additional Made Smarter funding, Orapi recruited a specialist intern through the WMG Internship Programme to help introduce AI into key business processes while sharing new skills and knowledge with employees."

For Orapi's AI Internship project, WMG provided technical support and supervision to the intern throughout the project. The initiative was also led by Matt Thomson, who identified the importance of embracing AI and automation to build on the new CRM, reduce manual work, improve processes and build internal confidence with new technologies."

After securing grant support and shaping the internship brief, he selected AI intern Pooria Tabesh Mehr from a shortlist provided by Made Smarter and WMG. Pooria supported the technical delivery of the programme, implementing practical automation projects across the business in areas including product datasheet translation, product data extraction and structuring, invoice handling and catalogue translation.

Together, these projects have helped save more than 200 working days across the business.

Another intern, Suraj Krishna, was also supported through the programme to work on an engineering product development project.

## Impact:
### Better customer service, stronger processes and a platform for growth

Although the CRM system has only recently been implemented, the impact is already being felt across the business.

Employees can access customer information quickly; management has greater visibility of sales activity and reporting has improved dramatically.

Matt said: "We can now see where opportunities are coming from, what deals we're working on and what stage they're at.

"The improved visibility means opportunities are less likely to be missed and customer enquiries can be handled more efficiently.

"This is helping us build stronger customer relationships by giving teams clearer information, better visibility and a more consistent way of working."

Orapi believes the new system will help it achieve its £10 million revenue target, improve productivity by between 13 and 35 per cent and create six new jobs over the coming years.

As part of the wider digital transformation programme, employees have also received upgraded equipment, including new laptops and additional screens, helping support flexible working and future growth plans.

John Wood, Digital Transformation Specialist at Made Smarter West Midlands, said Orapi's journey demonstrates how digital technology can unlock growth by addressing everyday business challenges.

"Like many manufacturers, Orapi had a lot of valuable knowledge within the business, but much of it wasn't being captured in a way that everyone could access and benefit from," he said.

"By investing in the right CRM system, they've brought all of their customer information together in one place. That helps staff work more effectively and gives managers a much clearer view of the business.

"What's particularly impressive is how quickly the team has embraced the new system., With a clear buy-in from its staff, Orapi is now in a strong position to explore AI and automation while continuing to grow."