MADE SMARTER

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- Claire Umney, Managing Director, Alwayse



John Wood, Made Smarter; Claire Umney, Alwayse Engineering; Onur Eren, WMG

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Alwayse Engineering gets the ball rolling after Made Smarter West Midlands support

A Birmingham-based manufacturer of movement solutions that help businesses move more heavy items across flat surfaces is set to adopt transformative digital technology after support from Made Smarter West Midlands.

Alwayse Engineering, founded in 1939, designs and manufactures a wide mix of ball transfer units and complete movement solutions used by companies all over the world in logistics, transport, energy, construction, pharmaceutical and even the entertainment industry.

While its previous focus on improving production processes at its Aston factory had achieved great results for the business over the years, its antiquated IT systems were preventing it from implementing modern solutions such as AI.

After advice from Made Smarter West Midlands and support with a grant application, Alwayse has overhauled its IT and enterprise resource management (ERP) systems to set the foundations to integrate new technology into the business.

Claire Umney, Managing Director of Alwayse, said: “This is step one of a longer journey for Alwayse, and thanks to Made Smarter’s support along the way, we’re confident this change can take the company to the next level.”

The Challenge

The former ERP system that Alwayse Engineering used had not been altered for several years, meaning newer programmes and technologies could not be integrated.

It also presented a security risk due to the hosting infrastructure.

These issues were blockers to growth and to gaining an advantage in what is a very competitive landscape.

“I knew our system had to change, but I wasn’t completely sure of the best way of doing it,” Claire said.

She later came across Made Smarter West Midlands at an event held by Make UK, an organisation that champions UK manufacturing.

Claire spoke with Paul Milne at WMG, a partner of Made Smarter West Midlands, who explained the grants Alwayse may be eligible for to help solve its problems.

Claire decided to apply for support via the Made Smarter website, and a meeting to discuss potential solutions was arranged.

The Solution

Claire met with representatives from Made Smarter West Midlands alongside Onur Eren, Principal Engineer at WMG, to explore the best way of modernising Alwayse’s legacy ERP and IT infrastructure.

A detailed review was undertaken covering operational requirements, scalability, cloud migration considerations, integration capability and the viability of alternative ERP platforms. Several options were explored during the process.

Following the due diligence exercise, a comprehensive modernisation of Alwayse’s ERP and IT infrastructure was identified as the most effective and commercially viable solution for the business.

WMG also worked closely with Alwayse to develop a strategic digital roadmap outlining how the company could progressively adopt further digital technologies including automation, advanced analytics and AI-enabled capabilities.

Onur said: “The legacy platform was creating operational limitations across reporting, data visibility, margin tracking and system integration, while also restricting Alwayse’s ability to adopt newer digital technologies.

“Although the project was technically considered a migration to a newer ERP environment, in reality the foundational technology completely changed, enhanced functionality was introduced and legacy customisations were rationalised, creating a far more scalable and future-ready digital foundation for the business.”

Made Smarter West Midlands also guided Claire and Alwayse through the grant application process, where Alwayse applied for a match-funded grant of £20,000 towards the cost of a new system.

The Benefits

An immediate benefit of the overhauled ERP system is its ability to give Claire and the business access to much more reliable data from all areas of the business.

The system is integrated with business analytics software that quickly processes and analyses data that the ERP collates, allowing Alwayse to make much more informed decisions about machine uptime, cost-benefit of particular jobs, and more.

Alwayse is also beginning to introduce more automated processes into its workflow, such as quote generation.

Claire said: “Depending on the complexity of the job, a quote could take up to 48 hours to calculate for a particular customer.

“With the adoption of quote automation thanks to our new ERP, we expect 80% of our quotes will now be generated in less than 30 minutes, with much of that time being spent on final checks of indicative quotes done by our staff.

“This will allow us to complete work for our customers much more quickly, and is just one example of how we can increase our productivity just by improving our ERP system.”

Many of its 37 staff are also being upskilled in how to utilise the system effectively, with one being named as a digital champion who will take the lead on overseeing new digital functions at Alwayse.

John Wood, Digital Transformation Specialist at Made Smarter West Midlands, added: “It’s great to see Alwayse reap the benefits of its new ERP system so quickly.

“For many of the businesses we help, a common problem is old or unsuitable IT systems that haven’t been changed, often due to a lack of time or knowledge of what works best.

“Made Smarter West Midlands allows SMEs to take a step back and make important decisions like these with the capital risk reduced thanks to our grants.

“We’re really pleased that Claire and Alwayse can look to the future with confidence now that the new systems are in place.”

The Future

Alwayse has set its sights on further improvements, such as eliminating physical paper from its ordering processes.

This will enable it to become even leaner, improving productivity and winning more work.

“None of this would be possible without us making that all-important change to our IT and ERP systems in the first place,” Claire added.

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SUCCESS STORY