



Counting beans means Heinz moves from the abacus to the microchip - How technology is helping to ensure cash flow and credit control

Many Brits have grown up on Heinz foods. Its products are familiar occupants of kitchen cupboards in households across the country.

Ensuring that these products reach the shelves of our shops requires effective supply chain management. For Heinz this means making sure the goods leave the warehouse on time, and that payment is received with equal punctuality.

Monitoring cash flow within a company is an essential task for even the smallest business. But when millions of pounds are passing through the company every week, efficient credit control is vital. Tracking incoming payments and deadlines, updating sales ledgers and analysing cash flow requires the right tools.

Heinz is one large corporation which recognised the need for the right software package to enforce stringent credit control. Heinz wanted to be able to fully automate its credit control procedure and to use a central system to do so. Heinz needed a system that could produce reports tailored to its customer base. This meant it needed the flexibility to extrapolate account details for independent outlets as well as large invoices for supermarket chains. It also wanted to improve internal reporting procedures, with the ability to draw off any part of the system, to separate invoices or brand descriptions.

Heinz began using Exchequer Enterprise's accounting package a year and a half ago to process customer accounts. In particular it was looking for a number of features which would help it boost the efficiency of the customer accounts department. The team of nine in the customer sales accounts department needed a sales ledger to maintain customer records for 800 customers in the UK. With tens of millions of pounds a month in customer payments passing through the department, Heinz needs tight control and an efficient method of tracking and handling invoicing and payment procedures for customers.

The accounting package has facilitated the department's work in a number of ways. For instance, using an 'alert' system, staff can be warned of approaching payment deadlines. Contact details and further account information can be attached to this diary. After an alert, staff can process an automatic mail merge to follow up invoices due from particular customers with a letter.

"Exchequer Enterprise has made the day to day processing of transactions quicker and easier," said Geraldine Jason, sales ledger co-ordinator at Heinz. "Account adjustments can be made immediately without having to wait for the system to be updated overnight. "Working in real time means that we have access to accurate account details. If we want a statement on an account we can get the actual balance, rather than having to calculate any additional payments made that day."

Heinz also wanted a solution that could produce ad hoc reports so that data could be extrapolated from any part of the system and forwarded to Customs and Excise as required. Internal reporting procedures have also been improved. The ability to report on a customer's past sales and credit limits means it is easier for Heinz to analyse trends in levels of sales, and decide whether to increase credit limit. "Having that historical information available is a huge benefit to us, ensuring we make the right commercial decisions."

Exchequer Enterprise also has a drill down facility integrated onto the interface which has helped Heinz. "We can go down to single accounts or invoices from the main sales ledger which is a quick and convenient way of tracking customer payments. Also, we are able to get concise details of any account within minutes, for internal reporting and customer contact."

"We were looking for a provider with a high level of customer care and I was impressed by Exchequer's attitude," continued Geraldine Jason. "We chose Exchequer Software out of five vendors, because it is known for its flexible and well-designed software. For us, the main selling points were the layout and the security of the system."

Exchequer also developed a bespoke interface for Heinz, linking their mainframe legacy system to the Enterprise package, which is a PC-based application. With several hundred orders every day, many of which contain over a thousand items, all order processing at Heinz is performed on a mainframe, but the

credit control system needed to be installed on a Windows NT network - a completely separate operating system.

"We needed a link between the mainframe and the Windows NT server, whereby all invoices could be automatically transferred overnight to the PC-based accounts system. During the day, all money received could then be entered and allocated into the sales ledger from the desktop, with the balances automatically updated back to the mainframe. Exchequer did all this for us, which really made them stand out from the rest."

"Using Exchequer Enterprise means we can control 800 customer accounts on a single system. We also have the flexibility to follow up on payments, keeping cash flow within the business running. Most importantly we can offer our customers account details at any level and provide them with the most efficient service."

Heinz produces numerous products, that are sold through thousands of outlets and enjoyed by millions of people. This generates a significant amount of revenue which needs to be tracked, recorded and processed as efficiently as possible. Without the ability to maintain this cash flow, the supply chain needed to ensure its products reach our tables would be broken.