

Fine-tuning systems for the future

By Leslie Faughnan

Founded in 1974, Smithstown Light Engineering is one of a successful cluster of precision toolmaking and engineering firms in the mid-west that has been quietly thriving. Smithstown has just expanded its facility by 4,000 to 18,000 square feet, and continues to invest in high-end machine tools which are demanded by clients. Those clients include leading corporations such as Becton Dickinson, Boston Scientific, Filtertek, Millipore and Stryker. Products range from injection moulds and orthopaedic instruments and implants, to gauges

and precision components. In addition to medical devices, the company serves clients in the automotive and aeronautical industries. Its bespoke manufacturing services range from design and prototyping to final test and manufacture.

Currently employing 58 staff with turnover of over €6 million, Smithstown expects to continue expanding this year. "It was because we could see an expansion path ahead that we chose to move our business systems to a more comprehensive ERP financial system," said director Gerard King. "We wanted a comprehensive system that would manage everything from front-door to back-door. We were determined also to invest in a system that had a global pedigree, was appropriate for our sector and could be supported by more than a single local supplier.



Gerard King, director, Smithstown Light Engineering: 'We have complete visibility of our resources'

"We wanted to be as future-proofed as possible, looking five or ten years into the future," he said. The initial thinking began about three years ago, and a shortlist of three systems and suppliers was identified. The chosen solution was Epicor 9, which went live in May 2010 after about six months of set-up and fine-tuning.

IT manager Marc O'Maonigh said the company had been happy enough with a bespoke system that had been built up over a long period of time to match the internal business processes.

The new system generated a major culture change and required quite a lot of user training, because it was more of an off-the-shelf ERP solution, he said. "On the other hand, it covers the manufacturing and MRP requirements comprehensively and incorporates best practice in all of the processes. Most importantly, those processes are completely integrated from purchasing to scheduling to manufacturing," said O'Maonigh.

The new system tracks machine and materials resources, shop floor time and all of the other variables. "We can see our capacity usage for

weeks in advance," King said. "We can also see variations or potential problems very quickly. The system is constantly live, so alerts are generated in real time."

Smithstown management can analyse costs and profitability in depth across the business. "We can see our performance by project, by machine, by operator or whatever analysis we think might be useful. We have complete visibility of our resources," King said.

"In the medical devices sector, product traceability is very strict. We can give our clients complete visibility if required, from raw materials sourcing to who worked on the product, on what machine and when."

King said the firm was not particularly focusing on the return on investment. "We see this really as a strategic investment in smart systems to support us in a highly competitive sector with extremely high standards. We are still implementing aspects of the system, using the huge amount of customisation available to fine tune it to our needs."

Commercial profile: accountsIQ

Intelligent accounting from accountsIQ

In the crowded world of accounting solutions, it is crucial to be able to be different from the competition. But with users demanding familiarity and usability, how is it possible to stand out from the crowd in a way that simultaneously satisfies consumer demand and cuts costs? The answer is in the clouds. Or, specifically, in the cloud.

When Irish company accountsIQ was established in 2005, it was with the intention of building a 'software as a service' business solution, an application that was available over the web before people started calling this sort of thing 'the cloud'.

The revolutionary idea at the time was that something as sensitive as accountancy software could be made available as 'utility computing', a sort of pay-as-you-use solution that negated the need to buy and manage servers or even software. It is this sort of thinking that has led to the global development of the cloud, which has been identified in a recent report by Microsoft as being the next big development from an Ireland Inc perspective.

The idea for accountsIQ came not from a technology company, but from a chartered accountant: Tony Connolly. He was a partner in FGS, a medium-sized Dublin firm, when he was struck by the inefficiencies of traditional accounting software.

"A lot of accountants manage multiple clients, and there tend to be lots of documents and files flowing back and forth," Connolly said. "This was extremely labour-intensive and error-prone; accountants had to wait for files from clients before they could carry out their work and the client didn't get visibility until the accountant was finished and returned the file."



Tony Connolly CEO accountsIQ

While accountancy software solutions have been around for a long time, it wasn't until broadband became truly pervasive that 'software as a service' business applications were properly developed. In a world where people need access to the same books from multiple locations, being in the cloud can make a substantial difference, especially when compared with the financial considerations of installing multiple servers, linking locations via VPN and even buying the software itself.

"Our main focus is on multi-entity, multi-location businesses which need to access the same records, any time and anywhere," said Connolly. "It is the ideal solution for accountants and multi-entity groups such as franchise groups, retail multiples or groups with multiple subsidiaries. AccountsIQ allows these types of businesses to collaborate online, consolidate their results and benchmark their entities without paying for high-end accounting systems."

From a user's perspective, accountsIQ looks very much like a Windows application, but it exists entirely on the

web. It integrates seamlessly with other front-end systems, and training is quick and painless, meaning that people can be up-and-running in hours rather than in weeks.

From day one, users will begin to experience the system's benefits, which include cashflow management, business intelligence, e-banking integration and full paperless office capabilities.

Thanks to these benefits, accountsIQ is beginning to see some significant adoption both in Ireland and beyond; with over 1,500 users worldwide including Deloitte in Australia.

"The key message is that accountsIQ gives businesses their accounting solution as an operating expenditure rather than capital expenditure," Connolly said. "There are no peripheral costs on hardware and software, and especially in these times, where money is limited, this makes real sense for anyone."

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