

HRM delivery based on simplicity & practicality

Rexam Glass Barnsley Ltd is one of the largest glass manufacturing sites in Europe, with over 800 employees and production of 1.2 billion containers p.a. for many 'blue chip' beverage manufacturers.

It is the only UK glass production site in the beverage packaging sector of the Rexam Group, which has other operating sites in Sweden, Denmark, Poland, Holland and Germany.

The HR department is responsible for all aspects of people management, other than payroll, including Recruitment, Discipline, Health & Safety, Training and Appraisals.

Until fairly recently, they had to rely on manual systems – not through choice, but due to a lack of suitable software. According to Alan Haycock, HR Manager, who has been with the company for 30 years, "We initially decided to computerise over 10 years ago when the manual system became too inefficient."

"Our first attempt was to have a system developed in-house, but this proved to be so slow as to be unusable. Next we purchased a system from the then market-leader, Percom, but found that it was too rigid and would only work if we were prepared to change our processes to suit it."

So they decided to investigate, on a more thorough basis, what the market could actually supply. "We trawled the market, went round various exhibitions and found quite a lot of systems. But most were overly complicated for what we were looking for at the time, and some of the 'bigger' systems were very expensive. In addition, although we knew what we wanted in basic terms, we weren't 100% sure as to what we



wanted out of the system longer-term".

Most systems seemed to be too rigid, overly complex or very expensive – sometimes all three

"So the decision was that we had to go for something that met our current needs, but that we were confident had the flexibility to cope with wherever we needed to go – including integration facilities if we needed to move later".

The overall vision was clear:

- Keep it simple/focussed
- Be realistic and practical
- Take one step at a time
- Deliver 'quick wins'

The other key selection factor was a desire to gain a consensus view. Alan Haycock insisted that the 3 short-listed suppliers must demonstrate their system to all the potential users. "I did all the initial spadework, but the final decision was made by the whole department not just one person".

"We were all novices with regard to computer systems, and needed a system that could almost take you through what you needed to do – without too much effort. Not everyone even had a PC at

first, so we needed to learn from scratch and build confidence".

HR Classic was found to be the simplest both to learn and to use. It also had the flexibility to fit existing processes and, most importantly, could provide a foundation for the future.

"It's taken quite a lot of work to get all the information from a variety of sources, but we are happy with what we get out of the system and it certainly gets used on a very regular basis. And we have a good working relationship with Software for People; if we're stuck or want advice, we just pick up the 'phone and always get an answer".

We needed a system that could grow, without immense effort or additional fees for modules

Once the core system was in place, it was quickly realised that there were a number of ways in which the system could usefully be extended. HR Classic is a single system with vast flexibility, based on graphical building tools and a large library of components, so the team could determine what to add.

"We find we've been able to extend the system whenever

needed", says Alan Haycock.

"Occupational Health, for instance, is now supported – with Training and Safety staff having controlled access. This means we can use a common database to deal with a variety of issues".

"For example, at the simplest level, we can print address-labels immediately now and for selected groups of employees – instead of only being able to get a complete set from payroll".

"Another simple example is that we maintain car registrations on the system, so if someone has left their lights on in the car park we can look up who to contact. Using the technology to actually provide a service is what it is all about really".

"We also record sicknesses and any disciplinary warnings generated by our Sickness policy. Our immediate plans are to introduce the Absence Calendar component of HR Classic. As well as showing spells of absence graphically, it allows data to be recorded simply by clicking on calendar cells. And perhaps more importantly, it recognises shift patterns and calculates a series of totals for you".

"This is an example of one of our selection criteria – that we can

extend applications whenever we decide it is necessary, without having to worry about additional modules”.

We had to decide how much of our historical data would add value in the new HR system

Of course, any system is only as good as the quality of data held on it. However there was also a qualitative decision to be made as to whether or not some historical data was worth preserving, other than on the original paper records.

All data that existed in any electronic form was imported and checked using HR Classic tools. However the only option for the majority of the data was to key it in – and it was felt that much of the data (e.g. for past employees) did not warrant that effort.



But there were exceptions. In preparation for the next round of Appraisals, and for any Training Needs Analyses, it was decided that the system should show each employee’s complete history of training. This involved up to 30 years of data, most of which was only recorded on paper.

Keying in all this data was not a minor task! Jane Cartwright, HR Administrator, proved to have the necessary dedication to complete the task – her halo is still

shining – and is pleased with the response from HR’s clients.

“In less than a minute they can have a truly complete training history for any employee. In fact we plan to attach this to Appraisal forms, so everyone can see a true picture of their total training”.

If proof were needed that this was well received, then it is best demonstrated by the fact that Jane is now considering repeating the exercise for 30 years of paper based sickness records.

With any system you get back what you put in; but HR Classic gives it back with interest!

Sometimes the capabilities of the system suggest new ways of doing things. For instance the HR department used to issue reports to line managers, showing the job

title of employees and to whom they reported, but got very little feedback.

“One day SfP’s consultant showed me the organisation charting facilities, so I printed a few and stuck them on my wall”, says Alan Haycock. “As soon as any manager came to my office, they immediately asked if they could have a chart for their department. Not only was this easy to do but, on receipt, they all looked at the charts carefully and told us if anything was incorrect”.

“Whilst this facility will be used for analysing re-structuring options if and when needed, it has already improved our reputation for quality service”. “And it has also made my life a lot easier”, added Jane Cartwright.

A robust and flexible system is all very well, but what happens when anything goes wrong?

Even with the best will in the world, and reliable software, it is a fact of life that something will go wrong occasionally.

“We have been particularly impressed with the attitude and competence of all SfP’s support services. Right from the start of the implementation project, we found the support to be honest, effective and immediate. And whenever we need further help,

we get practical advice based on our specific needs not just generic answers”.

“For instance to get the best out of the reporting system, which is extremely powerful, you need to use it on a regular basis. But if we have forgotten how something works, and have a tight deadline, we can get a report built and sent to us electronically – within the annual maintenance scheme and without further charge”.

Whatever the future holds, we are confident that we can cope with a system evolving with us

With technology changing rapidly, what does Alan Haycock foresee in the future?

“We still have a long way to go before achieving my vision of a single organisational database. And although SAP is our central business system it seems a bit rigid for HR, so I am interested in consolidating what we have.”

“In particular, we would like to integrate HR Classic with other related systems such as our clocking-in and payroll systems. Eventually we will also need to integrate other corporate sites”.

HR Classic has extensive capabilities for achieving this level of integration, such that all data only needs to be entered in the one system – and allowing it all to be reported on seamlessly.

Also of interest is HR Intra, which provides a range of options for viewing and updating data over the Internet or an Intranet.

“Although we have a company Intranet, most of our workforce are not of an age that embraces computing. So, whilst I am sure it will come eventually, it is not an immediate priority to provide employee self-service facilities”.

“At the moment we prefer the personal touch. If any individual wants to have a look at what we hold on them, they can come to this office any day. However it is good to know that SfP can provide such facilities when required”.

“In the meantime, HR Classic has proved to be very simple to use and, with our determination to tackle only one thing at a time, we have a very effective solution. In particular, we are proud that for the first time we have an HR system that is seen as a success – for the HR department and by line management”.