

UK-BASED SOFTWARE HOUSE INVESTS IN PEOPLE TO FURTHER THE PRODUCT PORTFOLIO.

The last 12 months or so have been busy for Abaca Systems, the Ormskirk, England based software house which specialise in the development of industry-specific software for the efficient running of modern board and sheet plants. In an interview with Graham Dickinson, Sales Director, we get the low-down on how things are going.

"We have taken on four new programmers to cope with the expansion of the business and to manage development into the future using the latest languages," explains Mr Dickinson. "The first product to come out of the new back

office is our customer portal — Portal 3000 — which is currently being beta tested at two customers and will be on general release at the end of the year."

Customer Portal

Portal 3000 is a web based system that allows a converter's customer the ability to log into their account to:

- Check order progress (this goes as far as being able to see the vehicle, the job is planned on and when its due to depart the factory on its journey);
- Place orders online;
- Check stock levels;

- View CAD and artwork drawings;
- Retrieve copies of signed delivery notes (PODs);
- Retrieve invoices and credit notes.

This service will be provided through secure servers at Abaca's Head Office in Ormskirk and is backed up by the latest state of the art communications network to ensure reliability. "Many of our customers don't have IT departments or even internal IT support, so this means they don't need to provide any infrastructure as we will be taking care of it for them," states Mr Dickinson.

New for Small Clients

Mr Dickinson continues, "We have stuck to our blueprint of having only one fully

ABACA CONTINUES EXPANSION



integrated business management system — Packaging3000 — over the last 23 years. It has served us well as a strategy by allowing the business to focus completely on one thing and is a primary reason for our growth. Having only that one product to support has meant we are not stretched in developing and supporting lots of variants of the system. Twenty-three years on, we find ourselves with a strong market share and analysis

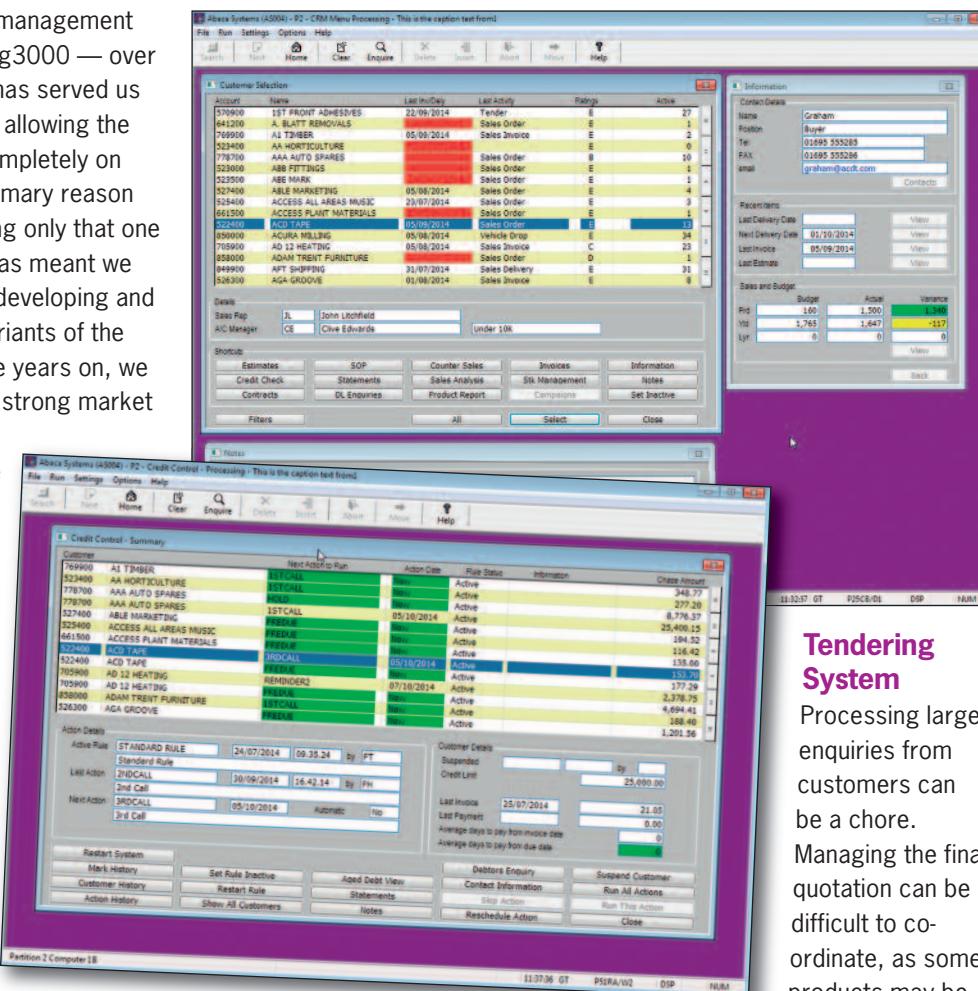
has revealed that the

biggest remaining market for us now in the UK is the smaller sheet plants. To try to attract these smaller businesses, we have produced a new version of the system with functionality we see as more suited to larger plants removed from it.

Examples of this are that the new system does not have our bar code scanning software, nor does it have the new tendering system and the accounts package is now optional so the customer can keep whatever accounts software they are used to using."

Production Scheduling

The company's scheduling module has proven successful since its launch two years ago and has undergone gradual evolution, as Mr Dickinson confirms, "We have just released the latest version. It has had some extensive improvements to performance, driven primarily by our partnership with Cumberland Packaging in Southend-on-Sea. They are a large sheet plant and a rigorous user of our scheduling system. They were struggling to



“We have just released the latest version. It has had some extensive improvements to performance, driven primarily by our partnership with Cumberland Packaging in Southend-on-Sea.”

get a good, consistent result with a large order book, so we dedicated a team member for three months to identify the issues and improve the product. The net result is that Cumberland have given it the thumbs up and it is now being upgraded at all other customers' sites."

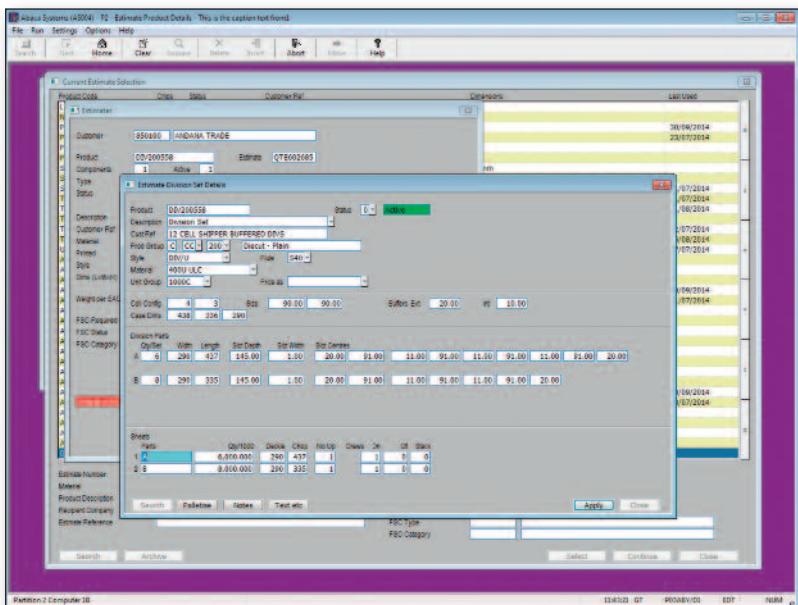
Tendering System

Processing large enquiries from customers can be a chore. Managing the final quotation can be difficult to co-ordinate, as some products may be made on site,

while other units might need to be bought in; the series of quotes needs to be amalgamated and presented back to the customer in a coherent fashion. "This message has been banging on our door for some time from several customers," continues Mr Dickinson. "We have worked with Challenge Packaging closely over the last year or so to try and clean up this aspect of the system." The end result is a new Tendering Module which will be part of the next version of the system due for release in 2015.

For Merchants

"We were really pleased to have taken an order for our system from a large UK business which is



primarily a packaging merchant," explains Mr Dickinson. "The software went live in July this year. We have always been able to handle buy/sell products within the system as most corrugated packaging businesses have this to some degree. However, this is by far the biggest merchant we have dealt with to date and we are working in partnership with them to evolve our system to be a strong contender in this marketplace. Some software changes were identified prior to installation, given that the ratio of merchanted goods far outweighs the manufacturing side of the business — and some of these have been successfully implemented. We are now in the process of working on improving direct deliveries where the product bypasses our customer and simply goes from source to end user. These changes will benefit all customers as this process takes place even in plants that are primarily manufacturing."

He continues, "Following this, we have a large development plan to alter the way we handle product dimensions so that instead of the typical corrugated dimensions of

length x width x height in mm, the system will cope with any number of dimensions in any units — for example, we could have a polythene bag shown as opening in mm x depth in mm x thickness in microns or gauge. Once that's complete, any product could be handled within the system, thus making it a generic merchanting product for any buy/sell business."

Direct Deliveries

Direct deliveries are a necessity for many customers. All sheet plants are different and few can make everything they sell. "No one likes to turn down business, so we

become imaginative and if we can't make it we probably know someone friendly who can — it's that sort of industry," explains Mr Dickinson. "So the problem is how do we get our computer system to handle the processing of this order using a third party and be able to handle the third party paperwork, correct labelling of goods and manage the progressing of the order even though its not taking place within our customers premises. Until now this was mainly done outside the system but we have been able to integrate third party deliveries such that we now have complete visibility of the transactions through the system.

GL Reporting

The company has confirmed it has also developed a new feature in the GL reporting module, which brings together a number of reports and collates them as a month end report pack. This simplifies the month end accounting procedure by enabling the pack to be run in one go, instead of a number of individual reports.

Shop Floor Data Collection

"We have had touch screen shop floor data collection screens in use for several years now," explains Mr Dickinson. "It's been decided to





overhaul this area of the software with a complete rewrite to improve functionality. This is a project which we expect to deliver in early 2015 and one of the main improvements will be the inclusion of a quality system within the SFDC, which we

hope will replace manual quality systems and checks that are in place currently.”

New Helpdesk

“Towards the end of 2013, we recognised the need to change our

internal helpdesk system as although the old one had served us well, it had become ineffective in handling the growing customer base,” continues Mr Dickinson. “We elected to install Freshdesk and between March and May, we successfully moved all of our customers onto the new platform. So far, we are really pleased with the result and feedback has been positive. One of the most significant benefits to the customers is that they no longer need to go on-line to log a support incident. They are able to email their issue to the helpdesk and it automatically creates a new incident report. Email correspondence can then take place between the customer and our support team and it all attaches itself to the helpdesk, enabling a comprehensive history to be built.” ■

Abaca: Helping your plant run like clockwork



The Abaca System:

**Quietly hones every vital part of your business
With each sub-process saving pennies or pounds
Thousands of times each month; automatically**

...helping Abaca's clients to make 93% more
money than their competitors*

* Source: Plimsoll

Abaca Systems Limited, 6 Hattersley Court, Ormskirk,
Lancashire, L39 2AY, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0) 1695 555285, Fax: +44 (0) 1695 555286

Winner of the Sheet Plant
Association's Supplier of the Year
Award in 2009, 2011 AND 2012

Sales enquiries: sales@abaca.co.uk

 **Abaca Systems** Ltd

