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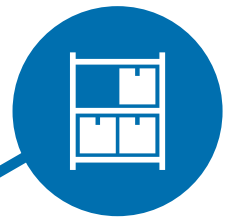
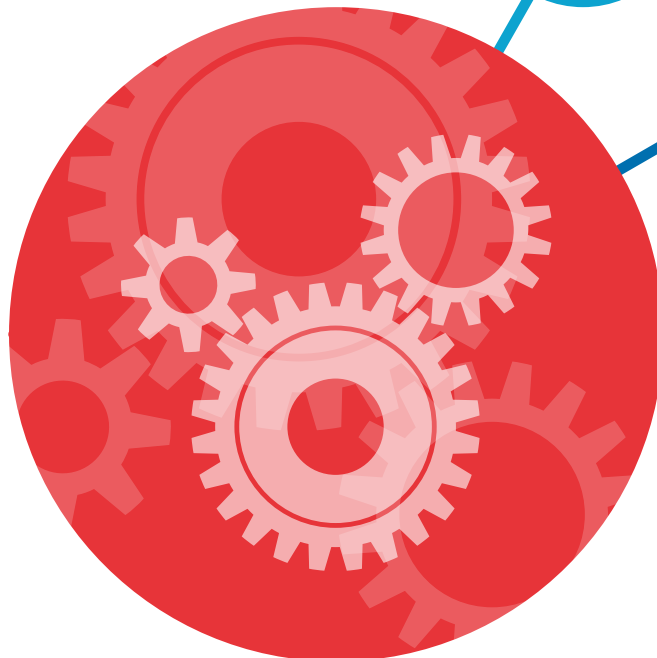
Aimia
foods

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Award-winning food and beverage manufacturer Aimia Foods, has been a longstanding customer of Sanderson. A recent upgrade of its leading ERP solution to UnityF8 has really produced the goods in terms of service, efficiency and profitability.

Aimia boasts an impressive list of awards and accreditations, including the Best Factory of the Year 2012, a Top 100 employer (the Guardian), and the only food manufacturer to hold a BRC Grade A* standard. Clearly, this is a company passionate about quality and service, and this extends to its suppliers, from which it demands similarly high standards.

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About Aimia Foods

Founded in 1981, Aimia Foods is a £70 million privately owned food and beverage manufacturer, headed by Rob Unsworth. It employs 260 staff working across three adjacent sites in Haydock, Merseyside.



It sells food and beverage products directly to the trade, as well as providing a packing service to blue-chip clients.

Aimia's "product" business involves the manufacturing, selling and marketing of Aimia-owned and third party licensed beverage brands, across all sectors of the UK market – Retail, Foodservice, Cash & Carry and Vending. It has exclusive licensing / partnership agreements with Mars, Weightwatchers, No Fear, Duerrs and Vimto, and also owns a number of well-established trade brands.

Aimia's "service" business provides specialist outsourcing services to blue-chip clients who choose to outsource all or part of their manufacturing activity, in order to allow greater focus on their core business. Aimia provides a full added value service offering to all its partners, which includes product innovation, packaging development, procurement, co-manufacturing, packing and distribution.

Outside the manufacturing sector, Aimia Foods may not be a household name but this is a business that stands apart from the rest. An unstinting commitment to quality, a can-do attitude and determination to be the best have earned it the highest industry accolades.



Aimia had been using Formul8, the specialist food and drink sector ERP solution from Sanderson that preceded UnityF8, since the late 1990s. Back then a period of rapid growth prompted the business to source a system that would both enable it to optimise processes and efficiency, and stand it in good stead for many years to come.

Systems Review

A decade and a half later, Aimia decided to embark on a review, as systems development manager Graham Wright explains: “Formul8 had served us well for many years, but I realised we could get more from a newer system which would integrate with other applications more easily.” One option for Aimia was to upgrade to a new solution from Sanderson, UnityF8, but Wright wanted to perform an in-depth evaluation of the market first, so he appointed a consultancy firm to help him with a formal review.

“To start with, we asked representatives from each department to talk to us about the drawbacks with the existing system, what they liked about Formul8, what they would like to be able to do, and so on. We could see that 80% of the departmental issues would be resolved immediately by moving to a newer solution – most wanted on-screen enquiries and drill-downs, and better integration with Microsoft Office and other Windows applications.

Next, Aimia and its consultants carried out an exercise to see if the issues would be better met by moving to a different ERP system or by upgrading to the latest ERP system from Sanderson, UnityF8. In all, this comprehensive review process took almost a year – but, as Wright says, deciding what was right for the business was the priority. “It’s about making IT work for us, not us working to fit a system. It would have been easy to base the decision on cost alone, but in all things, we focus on what the business needs first, and address cost later.

“We found that some issues could be addressed by Sanderson with parameter changes within the standard software, or with small software developments that would then be built into the standard product. Others were more of a ‘wish-list’ than critical selection criteria, but Sanderson presented their product roadmap and we could see that many were being addressed as part of its future investment in what is a specialist food industry product,” Wright recalls.

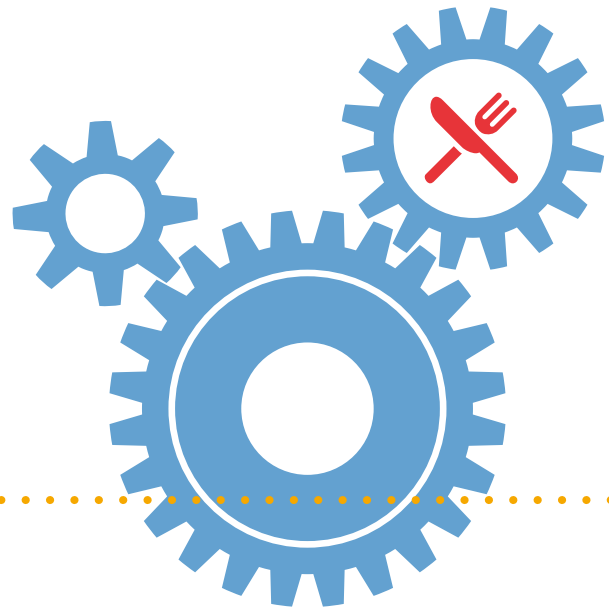


Modern software quickly solves user issues

Risk was another important factor in the decision to choose UnityF8, explains Wright: “The risk was significantly lower by upgrading to UnityF8 than by moving to a different system, plus development work for a new system would have been substantial too - on top of the system cost itself. We knew the underlying functionality of UnityF8 was based on Formul8, which we were already happy with, and that we could take advantage of the new Windows-related features.” Decision made and implementation planned, Wright says the upgrade went seamlessly.

Departmental requirements were met instantly. “They sound like simple things, but they made a huge difference to people – on-screen analysis

and drill downs, being able to sort information into reports and having several screens open simultaneously. Moving to UnityF8 we solved all these issues right away.”

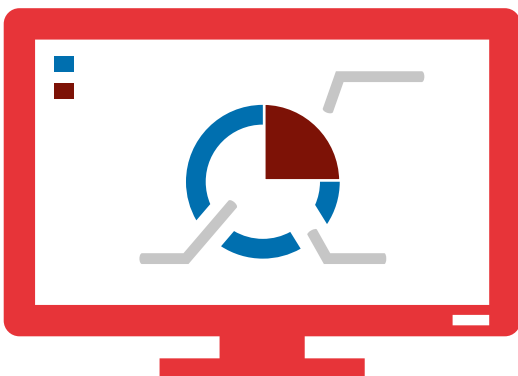


Enhanced Production Planning

UnityF8 continues to deliver many advantages. The most recent, according to Wright, is the recently implemented production planning, which is already saving significant time and effort. “We used to do our planning on Excel but since moving to UnityF8 have noticed a lot of benefits.

We can plan in advance, identify potential shortages, reduce stock levels and boost customer service.”

Previously, any production changes were fraught with risk, as Wright describes: “If someone wanted to bring an order forward on a particular line, we had to sit down with dozens of spreadsheets and work it all out. There was always potential for disaster if we’d missed anything. Now, we only have to grab a job on screen, drag it up and the system shows straight away what the effects will be.” He describes the time-saving and accuracy benefits as ‘incredible’, adding:

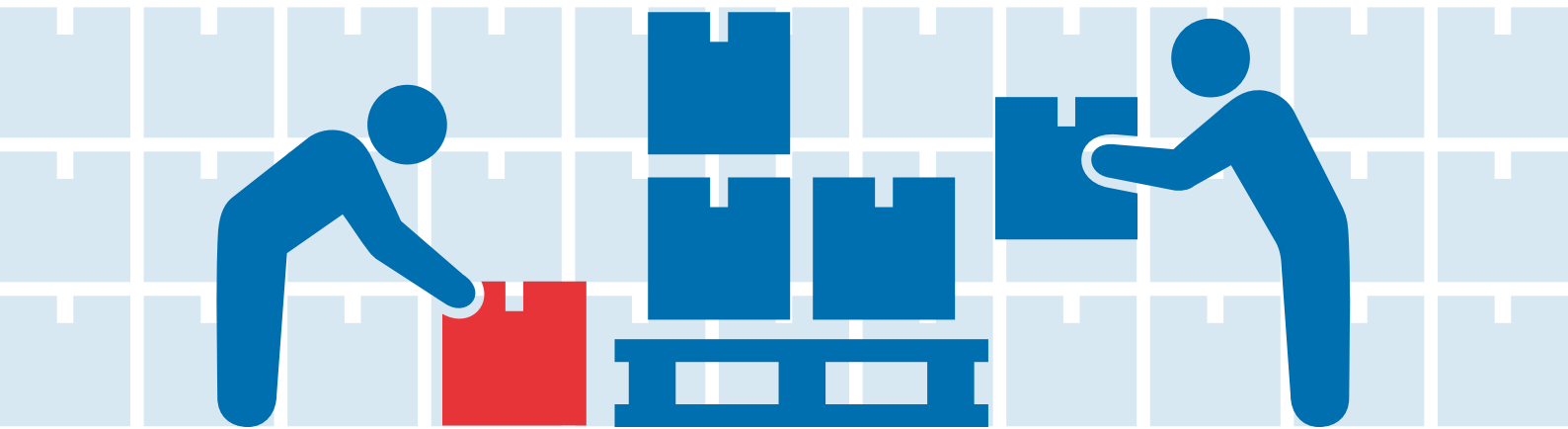


“It’s been a huge advantage to us; the reason stock is down now and we have fewer shortages, is because of the planning capability of UnityF8.”

Warehouse Automation

The implementation of the Sanderson warehouse management functionality had originally replaced a paper-based system dependent on pickers using their experience to locate stock. This drove major efficiency benefits, with rack and pallet control ensuring stock was picked in the right order.

“It was a big leap forward in itself, but the next step was wireless scanning with radio data terminals (RDTs). The devices told the picker where to go: they scanned the item, it added the product to the order and directed the picker to the next location.



“Warehouse Automation has been a great success for the company.”

after consultation with Sanderson to future-proof the company going forward in this critical area of the business.

Since introducing scanning with wireless equipment into the warehouse, we have reduced picking errors from sometimes up to 30 per month to only a handful over a whole year – with all the ‘knock-on’ benefits this has in terms of customer service levels and reduction in administration.

Further endorsing the importance of this, Aimia has recently replaced the original scanning hardware



'Retros' and customer rebates

Aimia also has a complex customer contract structure, incorporating retrospective rebates based on various criteria. The business knew it could secure competitive advantage by understanding the net profitability for each product and customer but was struggling to do this in a timely fashion. "We've always been able to report at a gross level – sales value, less material costs and labour," says Wright.

"But we wanted to include retrospective rebates and things like transport costs to reach a net figure. Rebates are different for all 100-plus customers, with varied start and finish dates, so they have unique criteria, and, to complicate things still further, some customers are in buying groups."

For example, a rebate might be effective from 1st September and include 30 customers in a single buying group. "Previously, we tried to calculate this by exporting the information into spreadsheets

at the end of the period, which meant we could never produce the information in time to report it accurately – and we had to do that for hundreds of customers," Wright comments.

The obvious answer lay within UnityF8. "All the customer, product and sales data is already there, so we worked with Sanderson to deliver a solution." That solution was a rebate module, which now gives Aimia the ability to enter the contract criteria at the outset, with UnityF8 then building the information throughout the contract period. "It's been fantastic," comments Wright.

The solution includes the integration of UnityF8 with the business intelligence tool QlikView, which is now offered to all UnityF8 customers (Sanderson is an official reseller). "QlikView is the icing on the cake for UnityF8 and is a really powerful management information product," enthuses Wright.



“We can analyse data in a multitude of ways and access information for any data captured in the system at the click of a button: by customer, product, period, and so on.”

An additional unforeseen benefit for rebates has been that we now have full contract control and can see how many contracts are due for renewal by any given date. We didn't anticipate this and it's been incredibly useful.”

In practical terms this means Aimia now only has to set contract criteria at the outset, instead of

spending hours and hours analysing retrospective data. “Having this data at our fingertips has added a massive amount to our bottom line,” confirms Wright. “We can now concentrate on the products that are most profitable because we have full control of the rebates. The benefit cannot be overestimated. This has been a huge change to the way we work: before, we had no tools to direct our decisions and now we have everything we need instantly available.”

Indeed, Aimia has an internal annual reward scheme and Wright's team won last year for implementing the rebate module and successfully delivering the net profitability project: “It had a major impact; more than any other business initiative,” says Wright proudly.



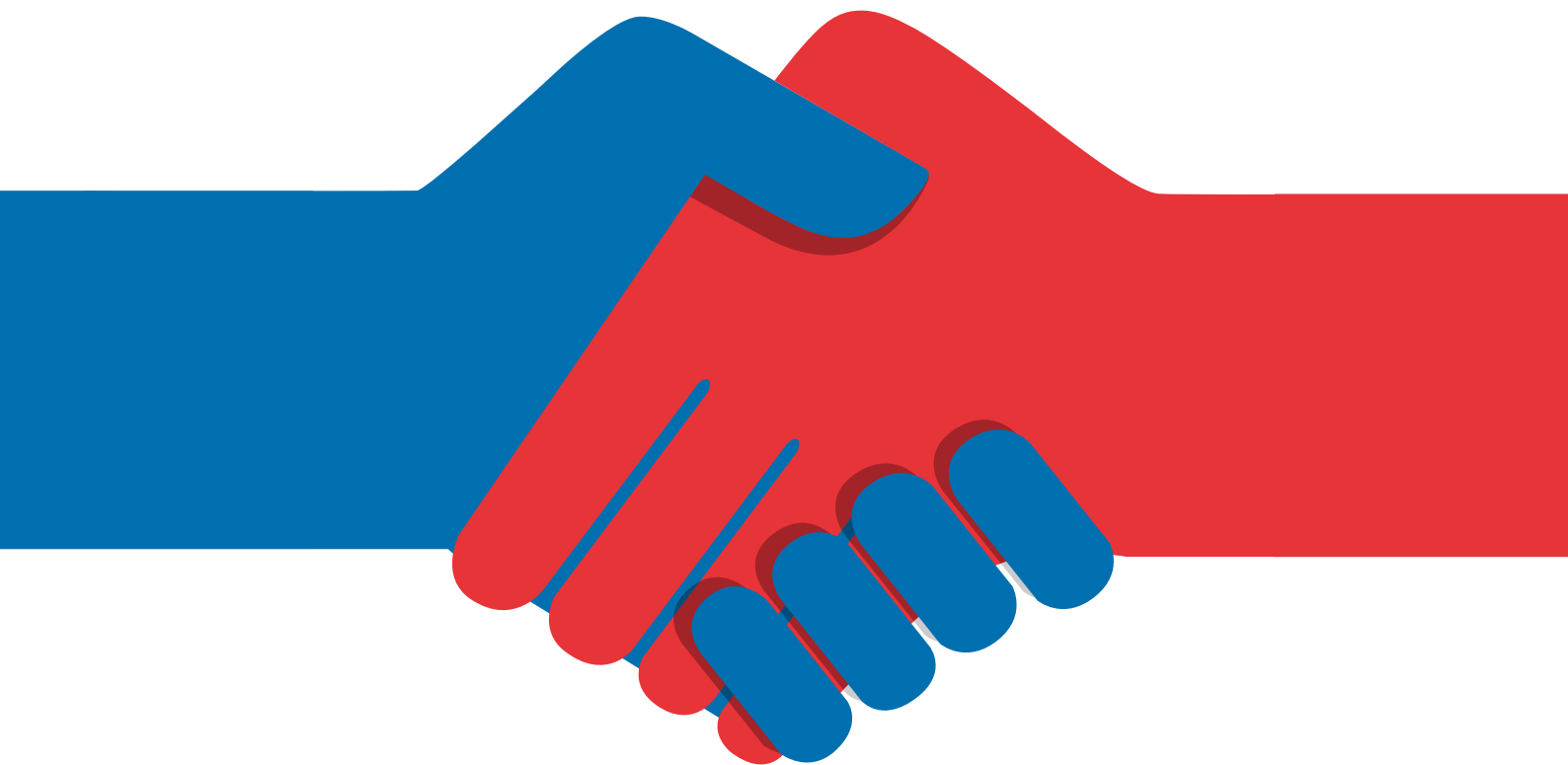
“Having this data at our fingertips has added a massive amount to our bottom line...”

The ability of Sanderson to mirror Aimia's standards has proved fundamental to the partnership.

"They are very flexible and responsive, the upgrade to UnityF8 was seamless" Wright confirms. "As we predicted, the system met almost all of our requirements on implementation, and for any changes we need we just put in a request and work with the Sanderson team to get it done".

Aimia continues to steadily increase usage of UnityF8 and with the number of concurrent users now approaching three figures, the company clearly feels it is a product it can continue to grow with. For an award-winning manufacturer, continuous improvement is part of its DNA – and in UnityF8, the company has the solution to underpin its ongoing quest for success.

“ I’ve worked with Sanderson from the outset and they have always been both quick to react, and very proactive at suggesting improvements. I don’t think any other supplier would deliver the results we need so swiftly. ”





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