

## Going bespoke for a complex business

<b>Benefits to Business</b>	Cost savings	x
	Streamlined processes	x
	Improved productivity	x
	Increased sales	x
	Reaching new customers	
	Product or process innovation	x
	Improved financial management	x
	Staff development	
	Supply chain efficiencies	x
	Recruitment	
	Flexible working	
	Improved customer service	x

Stokes Paints in Sheffield has chosen a local company to develop a bespoke IT system to work across the business, rather than an off the shelf packaged solution.

### About Stokes Paints

Stokes Paints is a family concern going back four generations to the 1800s. It has grown to be one of the country's most established paint manufacturers and is now in the top six industrial paint manufacturers in the UK.

Stokes' coatings are used for various purposes ranging from industrial high performance coatings to decorative and maintenance paints. The company also produce paints for household names.

Today, three members of the fourth generation of the Stokes family are directors of the company.

### Tailored vs off the shelf

Around three years ago, Stokes Paints was aware it needed to look at a new IT system. The existing system was proving inflexible and did not have the ability to grow with the company.

As a highly process driven business, Stokes required one intuitive system that could work and communicate across all the functions within the organisation, from manufacturing, stock control and deliveries to orders and sales.



The company was unsure as to whether the off the shelf enterprise packages on the market could meet the specific needs of its complex processes.

James Stokes recalls, "We had an old DOS based legacy system that we needed to update. We looked at the market and reviewed the benefits of both bespoke and large enterprise packaged solutions. We needed a system that was both flexible and scalable. It needed to be adaptable to the ongoing changes within our industry.

"We reviewed a number of proposals and met with a number of suppliers and consultants. We were amazed by the cost and comparable inflexibility of some of the larger enterprise systems for an organisation of our size."

Stokes put the work out to tender and chose to work with its incumbent supplier, Richlyn Systems, also based in Sheffield.

James explains, "Any technology we implemented had to fit in with the specific needs of our business. We could not change the business to suit the technology - technology needed to be designed to fit in with our existing business processes. We knew that Richlyn had both the experience and the knowledge of our business to build a solution to suit our needs."

Businesses today may feel that bigger is better when it comes to IT systems and be led to invest millions in off the shelf packages. However, what may be perfect for a large corporate organisation may not be best for all.

Richard Cowley, director at Richlyn Systems says, "Over the years, we had built up a strong relationship working with Stokes and a thorough understanding of the business. This was an opportunity to develop a system that was specific to Stokes' requirements and that could deliver better than a packaged enterprise solution."

## A system to match a complex industry



Paint manufacturing is a highly regulated industry. Every paint or coating is different, with complex chemical ingredients. The government requires all paints and coatings to be provided with a full break down of all chemical ingredients and formulas along with safety data sheets.

The complex nature of the regulations means the industry is in a constant state of change. Stokes Paints has an onsite development laboratory, where new formulas are developed in line with the changing government requirements.

Richard Cowley comments, "With such a complex and regulated industry as paint manufacturing, we believed that only a highly bespoke technology solution could meet the specific requirements. An off the shelf package simply could not adapt."

The changing nature of the industry required an IT system that could be flexible and open to regular updates without causing major upheaval in the business. As the system would also be accessed by employees from across the business, it needed to be intuitive and user-friendly.

James Stokes says, "We needed a system that could talk to the factory floor as well as accounts, sales and the R&D laboratory. Every employee at Stokes has access to the system in some form, from production to labelling to deliveries."

The system developed by Richlyn now sits across the business' supply chain as a whole, with applications covering sales orders, stock control, production, scheduling dispatch, inward deliveries and transport.

If prices change at suppliers, this is entered into the system and automatically reflected in the selling price. The system has a complex rules engine that allows Stokes to constantly review prices and rate its status with customers and suppliers on a monthly basis. It is interlinked from the initial order system right through to delivery, giving complete transparency and traceability throughout the system on every product and order.

In total, Richlyn spent around 15 months developing and implementing the system at Stokes, including reviewing initial programmes, file conversion and testing the system. However, the time and effort has proved to be a very worthwhile investment.

James Stokes says, "The system is integral to our business. It ensures we work smarter and all areas of our business communicate over the system. There is nothing happening in our business that is not recorded onto the system. It gives us complete visibility of the business as a whole.

"We truly believe we chose the best route with a bespoke solution. In such a complex and ever changing industry it is vital that our technology works with us, not against us. We already had the processes in place, we just needed the technology to make them more efficient.

"Richlyn has come to understand our business and the team are in the offices updating areas of the system as required. They have become a true partner, something that we may not have got from a larger enterprise player."

## Future plans – working together

James Stokes concludes, "We are looking to maybe allow customers access to the system to enter orders and track their status. It will involve potentially a move to a web based application. We are in constant discussions with Richlyn about our system and upgrade potential.

"We are confident in our current system and the capability it holds to develop alongside us as a business. Our close relationship with the team at Richlyn ensures we have a partner that truly understands our business and can advise us on how to develop the system to suit."

Stokes Paints  
Richlyn Systems

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