



Marshalling your resources

Marshalls is the UK's leading manufacturer of superior natural stone and innovative concrete hard landscaping products. It was established over 130 years ago and supplies the construction, home improvement and landscape markets, specialising in a wide range of products, design services and technical expertise. This study explores its selection of and implementation journey with Microsoft's Dynamics AX ERP solution with their partner eBECS.

The Marshalls Group, which had an annual turnover of £323 million in 2010, operates a diverse portfolio of business interests from managing its own quarries through to manufacturing goods and running regional service centres. It employs around 2400 people across 54 sites, not just in the UK, but also overseas.

This diversity is one of the key reasons that Marshalls relies heavily on Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP), and after many years of using Baan software the company was looking for a solution that would fit better with its business strategy.

Because Marshalls largely grows through acquisition – this meant that the solution had to be scalable to accommodate new businesses and their systems quickly and efficiently into the Marshalls model, primarily to ensure a smooth transition, and to realise the financial benefit of the acquisition more rapidly.

Marshalls had a clear idea of what it wanted from a new ERP solution and assessed both SAP and Oracle, before selecting Microsoft Dynamics AX. "We were using the integrator eBECS to support our Baan solution, and because they understood our business we were able to work closely with them to select the best solution" said Paul Thomas, group information systems director at Marshalls. "They recommended Microsoft Dynamics AX and having assessed it for ourselves we could also see that it would provide the right levels of flexibility and scalability."

Integration

Implementing the new software was carried out in partnership with eBECS and, enabled as they were with a ready knowledge of Marshall's processes, it was achieved with the utmost efficiency. "eBECS get to know your company inside out," says Steve Donnelly, AX programme manager at Marshalls. "This is a massive benefit, because we can send them into any one of our businesses and they can talk directly to all the relevant managers and come back to us with their recommendations."

In addition to the solid eBECS support the implementation of AX was eased by its familiar interface and interoperability with other Microsoft products with their familiar look and feel and navigation. This helped with the training process which had previously been lengthy, allowing everyone within the company, to get up to speed with how to use the system very quickly.

"I've got over twenty years of experience using ERP packages, and I would say that Microsoft

New AX generation launched

On September 13 Microsoft officially unveiled Dynamics AX 2012 – the latest version of its ERP offering.

At a well attended event in London delegates from across a range of manufacturing sectors, as well as service industries, were guided through the added functionality and flexibility of AX 2012. Major advances in the technology focus around enhanced manufacturing execution capabilities and also easy to use tools for facilitating alterations to organisational structure – essential as companies adapt to changing markets and to mergers and acquisitions. A spokesperson from PwC identified this latter enhancement of AX as "a defining strength".

A full write up of the AX 2012 launch will be featured in *TM* November



Dynamics AX is easily the best," continues Steve Donnelly. "This is because of its flexibility and its general usability – it is simple to customise – and this reduces lead times. By using more of the Microsoft stack, there are clear gains to be obtained in terms of total cost of ownership and return on investment."

Benefits to Marshalls

One of the major advantages of Dynamics AX to Marshalls is that its use is intuitive. This reduces difficulties with staff buy-in and has encouraged Marshalls employees to use the new system to its full potential.

“Microsoft Dynamics AX provides a flexible solution that can be adapted to meet the individual needs of your business. I would recommend it to anyone.”

Paul Thomas, Group Information Systems Director, Marshalls



The AX system has the ability to adapt screens and menus as well as forms, so internally labels have been applied in a way that people understand and this makes them feel comfortable with the system.

But what about the more tangible returns, so important in today's climate, when every spend must be justified.

Marshalls reports real results in terms of business costs, productivity, efficiency, customer service and more:

■ **COST REDUCTIONS** – Because visibility is possible across all companies and departments, Marshalls can assess its common suppliers and customers and negotiate better deals across the group. It is able to leverage the economies of scale by having centralised functions that require fewer people to manage them.

■ **FINANCE** - AX has enabled Marshalls to standardise finance processes across the Group, removing the task of consolidating many disparate systems and allowing them to reduce their reporting timescales and increase the accuracy of their reporting.

■ **BETTER SALES FOCUS AND INCREASED PRODUCTIVITY** – The solution integrates with Microsoft's Business Intelligence software to provide sales analysis, detailing which products have sold, in what quantities and the level of margin – this is helping the company to keep track and plan its product line-up for the future. In addition, raising of sales orders is much quicker because AX integrates smoothly with Marshalls 'fast quote' system which allows the sales team to convert a quote into an order. This gives the internal sales staff more time to follow up leads, talk to customers and generate new business, rather than just processing data.

■ **DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT** – Marshalls previously had to file reams of paperwork, but by using AX, all files are now held electronically and access is available to everyone. Information is fed into Word documents, which provides the businesses with layouts that are specific to customer needs, and instead of having to re-type documents, the information is available directly from the central files held in Dynamics AX.

■ **CUSTOMER SERVICE** – the greater visibility that Dynamics AX affords Marshalls has improved the customer experience, reducing errors and rectification costs.

Since Marshalls implemented AX, it has used it to support its growing ecommerce activities. "We were able to put together a web company within AX," says Paul Thomas, "and we built a front-end using Microsoft.Net and integrated the two together so that pricing, stock, product descriptions and catalogues are all driven in real-time from Dynamics AX. It automatically does all the confirmations, delivery notes and picking notes without any manual keying-in from our staff."

For Marshalls, Dynamics AX has achieved everything that was promised in terms of flexibility, integration and usability and the company is aiming to ensure that all its existing businesses and all new businesses that are acquired will be using AX moving forward. Paul Thomas concluded: "It provides a flexible solution that can be adapted to meet the individual needs of your business. I would recommend it to anyone."

eBECS
Experts in Microsoft Dynamics

For more information and to watch the case study video please visit www.ebecs.com/customers/marshalls