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Selecting an appropriate Business Management System

As a growing and successful fresh produce supplier, you have realised there is a significant move away from the traditional produce trading environment to a more service oriented business. Suddenly your current systems are struggling to meet the needs of the business. The proliferation of spreadsheets and databases is always a good indication that you have outgrown your current system.

As a result administration costs increase as it becomes more difficult to produce the information that you, your suppliers and your customers demand. Furthermore, to take advantage of emerging opportunities due to the supplier consolidation within the industry, your current systems will need a major and probably expensive revamp. So, where do you start?

The first suggestion is to realise that this is a key strategic business decision rather than an IT problem. A company views assets in many ways. In simplistic terms they can be broken down into four distinct elements:

People – Processes – Information – Relationships.



Software Enables Business Effectiveness

When viewed this way it is simple to see how software can be used as a business enabler, underpinning and pulling all the major assets together into a single core business application. The decision on the solution of choice is therefore business critical and should be made at the highest level.

By their very nature, integrated business management systems affect all parts of the enterprise. They include marketing, sales, inventory management, distribution processes, human resources, liaison with growers, pack houses, customers, financial and quality



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control. In the above model if a change occurs in one part of the business, it is immediately available to everyone on the system.

The next stage involves defining the requirements to be met by any prospective new business management solution. When defining your requirements ignore any current IT restrictions and any preconceptions you may have with regards to what IT can and cannot do. A good discipline is to try to quantify the expected business benefit against each of the required facilities. The advantage of this approach is that it forces you to look critically at your current processes. Even without changing systems, you may find outdated process in place “because we have always done it like this”.

Once you have your top level business requirements in place you now need to consult a representative from each of the departments affected. Seeking contributions from these people will pay dividends later. Nobody likes change so it is important to get them involved early in a project that is likely to have an impact on their daily working practices. You are now ready to engage with prospective supply partners.

And here is the good news. Today with the entry of major global players such as SAP and Microsoft the options available to you has dramatically increased. How? The simple answer is flexibility.

In all my years of being involved with the Fresh Produce Industry, I have yet to see any two companies whose People – Processes – Information and Relationships are exactly alike. Few companies can use the same system, without comprising some issues or incurring significant costs making changes. Your business review will tell you that you need a system which can adapt to the way you do business, not the other way around!

Modern systems not only have a low cost of ownership, but come with an impressive amount of base functionality. This can quickly and easily be configured to meet your specific needs. However selecting a solution is only one part of the equation. Who you select to partner in this important exercise is also crucial and will be covered in the next article.

In the meantime if you want to get a head start then contact linkfresh@angliabs.com