

## NEW SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS ERP SUCCESS FACTORS

This month, David Hurley, managing director of Anglia Business Solutions, outlines the results of a recent survey that put the implementation of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems in the fresh produce sector into context. Fresh produce firms are starting to take advantage of the trend for industry-specific software

**THE PATCHY** record of success in deploying fully integrated enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems within the fresh produce sector has been put into context by a recently released survey.

Panorama Consulting Group is a company specialising in the provision of deployment services to companies embarking on ERP projects. They carried out a comprehensive global research exercise across 1,300 organisations that had recently deployed such solutions. Their findings make interesting reading.

The first conclusion that emerged from the study is that 93 per cent took longer to implement than planned. Some 68 per cent took far longer. The average deployment timescale was 20 months.

Some 65 per cent cost much more than the original budget. The survey also measured the expenditure invested as a percentage of turnover. This ranged from a whopping 18 per cent on SAP deployments to five per cent in the case of Microsoft.

Some 69 per cent failed to realise that more than half of the forecast business benefits and 57 per cent of the respondents said that they were satisfied with the results.

The survey went on to ask more detailed questions on the experiences of the companies throughout the implementation process. The key factors that emerged from these experiences included a lack of employee commitment to the project, expenditure restrictions and a lack of appropriate process management skills within the company. Their conclusions were to select the solution carefully, implement effectively, don't cut corners and (hardly surprisingly), engage outside expertise to facilitate the transition.

The fresh produce industry has always faced particular challenges in the deployment of ERP systems. This is due to the velocity of perishable low-cost products through the supply chain. The challenge of capturing all of the required detailed data in such a fast-

changing environment is considerable. In traditional production industries, the norm is that people have more time, as the time lag between ordering and delivery is usually days and weeks, rather than hours. Furthermore, the products produced have longer shelf lives, which provides the manufacturers with more breathing space.

However, the survey highlights the reason for the change currently taking place within the ERP marketplace. According to the current statistics, 80 per cent of ERP systems deployed are based on configuring or developing the standard out of the box functionality to meet the specific needs of the client. This can be a long, tortuous and expensive iterative process, as in an integrated system, changes to one part of the system can have unexpected consequences in another.

It is for these reasons that the industry pundits are predicting a rapid move towards packaged solutions where industry functionality is already built into the ERP system. Indeed, the predictions are that the future trend will mean that within five years, 80 per cent of ERP solutions deployed will consist of applications specifically designed for vertical industries. Having functionality that encompasses best practice for the industry within the packaged application is a significant advantage. It accelerates the deployment, de-risks the project, reduces the cost of ownership and facilitates the incorporation of future developments and upgrades.

Using this approach, it has been possible to deploy end-to-end fresh produce solutions in less than a third of the time highlighted in the featured survey, and within a significantly lower cost as a percentage of turnover.

The rest of the ERP world is rapidly becoming aware of the commercial potential of industry-specific packaged software. In the meantime, the fresh produce industry is already taking advantage of the trend. ○



## LIKE THEM APPLES?

**SHOPPERS NOW** have images and information on more than 20 different apple varieties available via iPhones and iPod touch.

Them Apples, a new app downloadable through iTunes, features a comprehensive index of the most popular apple varieties and their best uses. The app is a free download.

Jim Allen, president of the New York Apple Association, said: "This app is like having an apple variety guide right at your fingertips."

The app was created by Aquariform Designs in conjunction with the New York Apple Association, which represents all of New York's apple growers.

Each apple variety on the application is assigned a details page, which highlights the flavour and texture characteristics of the variety, as well as how they rate for basic uses such as eating, baking, sauces and pies.

The programme is best suited for consumers while shopping at the supermarket.

Susan Bressan, the app developer, said: "Various views make it a snap to get the information you need at your fingertips, such as what apples make excellent pies."

The app is already receiving a four-star rating from users and is fully compatible with all iPhone and iPod touch devices. ○

## CASHLESS CATERING

**TOSHIBA TEC** has partnered with MH Systems and HPort to provide a solution that has enabled one Essex school to implement a completely cashless catering system.

Funded by Essex County Council, the system, which has been installed at the Philip Morant School, uses Toshiba STA-10 POS tills loaded with MH Systems' 'Chips' cashless catering software, combined with HPort Systems nutrients data.

Since implementation, the number of pupils using the canteen has increased by 50 per cent and transaction time at the canteens' three tills has sped up, allowing up to 800 pupils through every 20 minutes.

The chosen system needed to integrate with HPort Systems' nutrient data, which provides a complete analysis of nutritional data for each pupil based on their daily purchases in school. Philip Morant looked at four different POS suppliers and visited a number of

schools using different applications. They finally selected the MH Systems, Toshiba TEC, HPort Systems' solution because of its flexibility, ability to meet the specific needs of a school environment and ultimately meet the future goal of a totally 'cash-less' school.

Parents can load the required amount of cash onto their children's school cash cards via ParentPay or credit or debit cards at the school reception. Money is available immediately and whenever a transaction is made, the amount is then taken from the account. Because the money on the card is only available to spend in the school, parents do not have to worry that the cash they give their children will be spent elsewhere.

Sheila Verrall, the school catering manager, said: "Parent feedback to the cashless catering system has been tremendous, with some 85 per cent of parents adopting the scheme." ○