



## Trinity Computer Services Ltd Customer Case Study

### Bearings Distributor's Business Operations Run Smoothly, with Microsoft Great Plains Software Solution

#### Overview

**Country or Region:** United Kingdom

**Industry:** Bearings and Power  
Transmission Distribution

#### Customer Profile

Acorn Industrial Services Ltd is a major stockist and distributor of bearings and power transmission products, having distributorships with many of the leading manufacturers.

#### Business Situation

The company wanted new technology that would be more robust and deliver better reporting and integration on a platform that would support future growth.

#### Solution

Microsoft Great Plains with Trinity's distribution software modules.

#### Benefits

- Fast reliable order processing, giving enhanced customer service
- Stock items grouped exactly as required for equivalency matching across 200,000 inventory items
- Scalable solutions enable rapid expansion
- Improved reporting and integration
- Better stock management giving reduced stockholding costs.
- Rapid price update improves order and invoice accuracy whilst protecting margins

“Our business is all about excellence in customer service, and Great Plains with Trinity's distribution expertise gives us the tools to help deliver this”

Desmond Spillings, Sales Director, Acorn Industrial Services Ltd

Acorn Industrial Services Ltd has over the last twenty years become a major stockist and distributor of bearings, seals and power transmission products, and has always prided itself on its exceptional customer service. Today with almost £3M of inventory it is relied on by its customers to be able to deliver product as and when they need it across the United Kingdom and beyond.

The company's existing computer systems of eight years' had served them well, however whilst the market had become more demanding and Acorn's needs became more sophisticated, their ageing software had failed to keep pace. To realise their goals and continue to prosper in this ever challenging sector, Acorn's management team knew they needed to address the issue. With a clearly defined set of objectives they began to investigate the market for a fully integrated and highly functional solution that would support their existing business model as well as provide a platform for future growth. They chose Microsoft Great Plains as the system that most closely matched the criteria.

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Richard Hewitt, Operations Manager, Acorn

## Situation

Acorn Industrial Services Ltd is a major stockist and distributor of bearings and power transmission products, having distributorships with many of the leading manufacturers. With a head office in Rotherham and branches across the UK, the company provides a fast and effective service nationally and overseas.

### Customer Service is Key

Operating in a ‘distress purchase’ environment where items are needed quickly, the quality of customer service is absolutely key. Acorn needs to be able quote, order and deliver as speedily as possible to meet customer expectations.

The company’s previous business system had served them well and was considered a major player in the market. Richard Hewitt, Operations Manager says; “Eight years ago when we last changed our system we invested a lot of time and effort ensuring that we made the system meet our needs. The problem was that since then Acorn had moved on but the system hadn’t. We had taken the old system to its limits and now we needed something more; more robust, newer technology and the better integration and reporting that we would derive from that.”

### System Improvements

As well as the expected general improvements Acorn had some specific problem areas to target. Better stock control was needed, as the previous system didn’t fully integrate the inventory ledger and more importantly compromised inventory tracking by combining different parts under the same part number. “We had to do this to try and address a need of our industry,” says Hewitt “but we always knew that it was a compromise situation.”

Quotes were not being recorded on the system and a fast and effective method of capturing this information had to be found that would work in the fast ‘distress

purchase’ environment in which Acorn operates; choosing from the 200,000 or so inventory items on record and entering into quotes without slowing down the response times for the sales team.

## Solution

After spending considerable time evaluating software packages including OGL and Exchequer, Acorn decided that Microsoft Business Solutions – Great Plains in combination with Trinity’s distribution software modules was the correct choice for their business. “We were keen to find a solution that would let us address the specific needs of our business” says Martin Povey. “The time was right for us to take a fresh look at this and with Great Plains we believed we could achieve our functional requirements with the additional benefits that would come from a technologically leading product.”

“The fundamental issue we faced was to maintain accurate stock whilst still allowing the grouping of like items together” adds Hewitt. “This had always been a compromise before and we felt that this time we didn’t want that compromise.”

Acorn’s IT supplier, ETS, was aware of the company’s need for a solution that was as functionally rich as it was broad in capability. To avoid compromise on the stock issue they knew help was needed. Through the Microsoft Global Partner Network, ETS knew that Trinity, a fellow Microsoft Business Solutions partner and ISV, had produced a range of software modules which added industry specific functionality to the Great Plains environment amongst which were modules suited to the Acorn business model.

Whilst Great Plains offered state of the art technology for financials, sales order processing and inventory management, Trinity had the specific experience and modules needed for a fast moving distribution environment. A catalogue

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Martin Povey, Financial Director, Acorn

based sales module that allows for the separation of inventory groupings from 200,000 inventory lines, was introduced giving the company both excellent control and flexibility in its management of stock.

The new solution was implemented using local client at the head office with their remote branches connecting via terminal services. The business application is hosted on a centralised server and made available through a virtual private network (VPN) and ADSL links to more than 40 users across the organisation. Now all the sales staff have immediate access to up to date stock details for their own and other branches and can enter or update any quotes, orders or queries on the system as well as having stock delivered direct from any branch.

### Benefits

#### **Product catalogue brings sales efficiency and enhanced customer service levels**

As a part of the implementation project Acorn's entire Sales Order and Shipping process was re-evaluated resulting in quotes that are now generated more quickly and efficiently by the sales team using the catalogue. To handle the size of Acorn's product range, Trinity extended the functionality of their catalogue software module to accommodate the specific needs of the bearings and power transmission distribution industry.

“The groupings we've used mean that our sales team can see exactly what the equivalent items are for any particular quote. This is critical to providing customers with a speedy and accurate response. Automatic building of quotes from the catalogue then streamlines the whole sales ordering process” says Hewitt.

#### **Integrated technology leads to improved management information & control**

“Some of the business issues we faced effectively solved themselves” says Povey. “We saw immediate benefits of being on

the Microsoft technology platform as the product was intuitive to use and had the same look and feel as the other applications our staff use on the desktop. From the financials point of view the out of the box functionality gave us vastly more reporting and control than we ever had before. The collections management module alone has given us measurable improvements in credit control. In stock management, Acorn's biggest asset, inventory replenishment and measurement tools give us the proactive basis to make real improvements in terms of stock value and its profile.”

#### **System copes effortlessly with the volume, speed and data demands of order entry**

Benefits of the system have been far reaching across the business. Acorn had never had a system fast enough to cope with the entering the volume of quotes and there was concern that in a live situation the same would be true for Great Plains. Such concerns were unfounded as Acorn now process around three times the amount previously recorded with the same sales staff. In addition each and every quote is captured in real-time enabling any member of the sales team to access this information as and when required, making for a smoother sales order process.

“This recording of all quotes and orders in the system and the ability to report this information lets us know not just what our customers buy but what they want to buy” says Desmond Spillings Sales Director, “just the amount of information we now have at our fingertips is invaluable for driving customer service.”

This information needs to be readily available and for this Acorn has the power of the underlying MS SQL database and the reporting tools available within Great Plains. They also have the choice of viewing information and reports within the system itself, or by one-click export to Excel.

## Microsoft Business Solutions

Microsoft Business Solutions offers a wide range of integrated end-to-end business applications and services designed to help small, mid-market and corporate businesses become more connected with customers, employees, partners and suppliers.

### For More Information

For more information about Microsoft Business Solutions, go to:  
[www.microsoft.com/businesssolutions](http://www.microsoft.com/businesssolutions)

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[www.microsoft.com](http://www.microsoft.com)

For more information about Trinity Computer Services Ltd products and services, visit the Web site at:  
[www.trinitycomputers.co.uk](http://www.trinitycomputers.co.uk)

“There are some margin reports we could only get after the month-end before, and now they are available immediately. This has to be good for both decision making and control” says Povey.

### System scales easily to match company expansion and product line growth

The system copes easily with Acorn’s 40 users and 200,000 inventory lines and the company now knows they have a system that can continue to keep pace with their expected growth. “We recently added a new branch and it was incorporated into the system very quickly via terminal services” says Povey.

The whole process took an elapsed time of four weeks with some additional data loading. All product training and installation was undertaken internally, reducing the overall cost to Acorn.

### Flexible pricing updates improve service accuracy at lower cost

With rapidly changing steel prices the bearings and power transmission market has faced many price changes of its own over the last few years. The flexible customer specific pricing and rapid list and cost price updates within Great Plains ensure that Acorn is as up to date as possible with its pricing. “Pricing updates used to take us a considerable amount of time, often measurable in days” says Povey. “Now the same updates take only a matter of minutes. The administration cost and time savings of these automated pricing updates have been significant.”

Automated pricing routines ensure that the Acorn sales team across the multi-site organisation provides customers with quotes using the latest accurate pricing. “Our customers get better and more accurate sales service as well as invoice accuracy” comments Povey, “whilst at the same time we are able to better manage and protect our sales margins on individual product lines.”

### Back-to-back ordering ensures on-time delivery

Operating in a ‘distress purchase’ environment means Acorn needs to maintain high stock availability and this often means intelligent and fast purchase ordering. Great Plains gives automatic purchase order generation for regularly stocked items and rapid back-to-back ordering when required. This has streamlined the whole purchase process, and when the goods arrive, easy on-screen matching for good receipts and invoices means those back-to-back orders are automatically identified. This leads to a rapid turnaround from the time of receipt to progressing and pick, pack and dispatch, whilst automated acknowledgements keep the customer informed of progress.

Povey says, “The order generation and back-order facilities in Great Plains have revolutionised our purchase and receiving procedures. Acorn now knows exactly when goods come in and which orders need to be fulfilled. The entire process is managed by just one person for all the branches.”

### Continual business improvement

As Acorn now looks to the future their aim is to continue to derive maximum business benefit from their system. A planned process of continued improvements will help them to take advantage of the latest technology advances. “Our business is all about excellence in customer service” says Spillings, “and Great Plains with Trinity’s distribution expertise gives us the tools to help deliver this.”

Martin Povey concludes, “The best thing is that this is just the start, where we go from here is up to us. We are now not limited by the technology we use and because of this we can go on improving the service levels that we offer to our customers. This is the main factor behind our success to date and will be significant in the ability to grow our business in the future.”

The logo for Trinity Computer Services Ltd, featuring the word "TRINITY" in a stylized, blue, sans-serif font. The letters are spaced out, and the "I" and "N" are slightly taller than the other letters.