

STAR

MICROSOFT NAVISION

Star Computers' project consultants worked closely with Simon Elvin to make sure the transfer to the new system was as smooth as possible.

An in-depth Case Study

Simon Elvin Limited
"Britain's favourite cards"

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When Sir Henry Cole, the chief organiser of the Great Exhibition, pioneer of the penny post and founder of the V&A museum invented the commercial Christmas card back in 1846, he unwittingly sparked off the UK greetings card industry that market researchers estimate had rocketed in worth to over £1.44 billion in 2007. When it comes to sending cards, the UK leads the world, with greetings cards stocked in more types of outlet than any other product – one in six retailers – and seemingly endless opportunities to mark an event with a card, quite literally from the cradle to the grave.

Congratulations on the birth of a baby; birthday greetings; engagement and marriage; wedding anniversary; welcome to a new home; good luck and bon voyage; passing a driving test or exam; Mothers day; Fathers Day; Christmas, New Year and Easter greetings; and sadly, condolences on

loss of a loved one, before the cycle starts all over again.

The Greeting Card Association says there are around 800 publishers of greetings cards in the UK, most of which are small businesses with less than five employees. So Simon Elvin Limited with 130 staff is a force to be reckoned with in this highly competitive sector.

David Orr, Operations Director for Simon Elvin, explained that the £27 million turnover company is the largest independent producer of greetings cards in UK, bringing well over 2000 different card designs to market every year and selling as many as 2 million cards a week.

“Simon Elvin is pretty well self-sufficient. Based in Wooburn Green, a village in Buckinghamshire the entire production of the cards is handled from start to finish. Here, our staff

includes artists to design the cards, verse writers to create the right sentiment, specialist machine operators to produce beautiful finishes, and our own warehousing to store and despatch the finished product in our own vehicles. In fact, our cards are printed less than a mile away at our sister company, Imperial Litho, a state of the art print works, with the capacity to produce in excess of 10 million cards a week,” David said.

“We launch brand new ranges five or six times a year, destined primarily for UK consumption but they also find their way to the Far East, the USA, Malta, Greece, South Africa and Holland. So rather like the fashion industry we are focused on moving current stock whilst looking ahead to the next series, making sure for example, that Christmas cards are with our wholesalers in the summer. We have also expanded into social

stationery, gift wrap and bags, keepsakes, tissue paper and ribbons and party ware.”

It is a constant challenge to continually refresh greetings card designs but those ranges that strike a chord with the buying public sell particularly well and might need one or two reprints to satisfy demand. So keeping on top of available stock is critical. Just as there is no benefit producing cards that don't sell, there is no point in unnecessary reprints when orders can be readily fulfilled from current stock.

However, Simon Elvin had a problem in that staff weren't always sure of what was still available for sale – and this was one of the prime drivers when the company decided to bring its computer system into the 21st century.

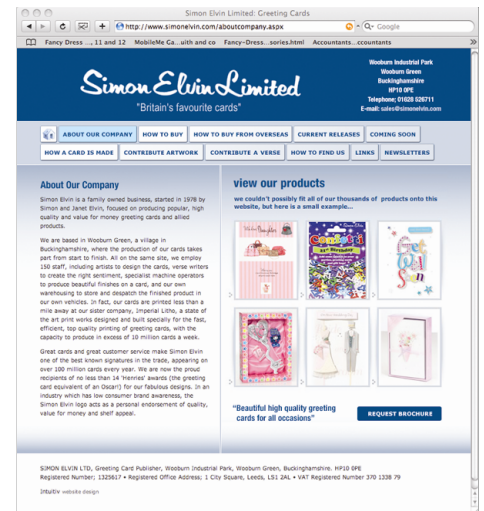
Sarah Schofield, Sales Office Manager for Simon Elvin, commented that although the 25-year-old bespoke system – complete with green VDU screens – was soldiering on, there were concerns that it would crash and the company would be set adrift from its essential stock recording, accounting and business information systems.

“In its heyday the system was fine, especially as it had been tailor-made

to fit the way in which the family-owned business and its founders – Simon and Janet Elvin – liked to work. But as the company grew, and the number of stock items we carried increased significantly, we became very nervous about the system's ability to cope. So at the end of 2007 we started looking for a replacement. Initially we considered the SAP package, working with resellers local to High Wycombe but we felt the SAP solution wasn't right for us. With the help of Star Computers we came down in favour of the Microsoft Dynamics NAV system,” Sarah explained.

“Also, I felt comfortable with Star Computers as a company. It has a similar set up to Simon Elvin – a family owned business and the way in which both companies work.”

The Microsoft Dynamics NAV system is a business management solution that can be implemented and customised rapidly, is easy to learn and use, and straightforward to maintain. Standard modules help users to handle process and stock management; benefit from analysis and business intelligence; improve reporting; streamline customer support through CRM (Customer Relationship Management); and



integrate seamlessly with other Microsoft products such as Microsoft Office.

David commented that he didn't expect to find a ready-made system that would fit the company's business like a glove. At the most it would satisfy 90% of the criteria, with the other 10% being resolved by some customisation. But the top priority was to implement sales order processing and accounting before considering other applications.

Star Computers' project consultants worked closely with Simon Elvin to make sure the transfer to the new system was as smooth as possible, pre-loading data and information

ahead of time in preparation for an overnight switchover, and training users in readiness.

“Rather than running the old and the new system in parallel for a while, which many companies do to make sure there are no problems, we had enough faith in Star Computers and the preparatory work we had done together to move direct to Navision. It all went remarkably well, going live on August 1st in 2008,” Sarah recalled.

“Navision has been very well received. It was a massive change for us moving from green screens with white text to the look and feel of Microsoft desktop products. One of the main purposes we needed it for was to introduce proper stock control. Before Navision we didn’t have accurate visibility through the computer of what we had in the warehouse. Now we have it at our fingertips and I think we are selling a lot more because of that.”

Interestingly, Simon Elvin does not use a traditional product and line number stock recording process. David explained that cards are sold in a series. “Normally there are two designs in each series and these are

captioned. It could be a ‘cute, female series’ which opens up to a caption such as wife, daughter, niece, get well, and so on. The order form is replicated on the PC screen and when a buyer calls into the sales department, staff type in the caption or description and the system automatically lists out what is currently available, from both current and previous ranges, and close the order whilst the customer is on the telephone. So unlike with the old system, we don’t have to check the stock position and call back, by which time the customer might have bought elsewhere.”

“This is backed by an extensive range of customised business reports that Star built for us,” Sarah continued, such as stock availability by order form, sales analysis by order form, or by customer, series or caption. We can also see on screen what we currently have on sales order and what is due to come in from production or external suppliers.”

Post implementation, Star Computers continues to provide first-class support through its helpdesk and online diagnosis service whilst Star consultants are always happy to visit the company to discuss further fine

tuning or fix those infrequent problems that can’t be handled remotely.

Currently, Simon Elvin has a Navision licence for 25 users and this will probably grow as the company becomes increasingly familiar with the applications. In common with many other organisations, Simon Elvin feels it is only just scratching the surface of what Navision can potentially do for the business.

“In some ways, it is like riding your first bike. You are a bit wobbly in the beginning so you have stabilisers. For example, we were a little nervous that the system would not be able to produce reports for Simon in the way he liked them, especially forward-looking projections of what we are likely to sell. But it wasn’t a problem at all. From an IT perspective, the stabilisers are coming off and I am sure that a year down the line we’ll be making much more use of the system. Next in line is to bring production and warehousing into Navision, which could have as big an impact as sales order processing and accounting. The system has given us exactly what we needed but we are sure there is a lot more to come,” David concluded.



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