

Case Study



REDUCING LEAD TIME AND IMPROVING QUALITY BY IDENTIFYING INEFFICIENCIES

iGrafx helps Potton Homes build on Quality

The Story

Potton Limited has been at the forefront of timber engineering for more than 40 years and is the UK's longest established timber frame manufacturer. It prides itself on its innovation and expertise in design, as well as its quality of manufacture.

Originally a company that produced a range of timber products as the Potton Timber Engineering Co, it built its first timber frame kit in 1968 to fulfill a government request for high quality, energy efficient, low-cost housing. Since that time, Potton has manufactured tens of thousands of home kits for self-build projects, larger developers and builders, as well as kits for hotels, including 200 THF Travel Lodges across the UK.

One of its biggest innovations has been its 'Heritage' range, which was specifically designed for the self-build market. This product changed the way people think about timber frame kits, because it can be tailored to builders' exact requirements, with an almost endless choice of options, rather than just offering a standard range of products.

Potton, which has recently become part of Kingspan Group, continues to drive innovation in the market: its 'lighthouse' range is the first UK-built net zero carbon house and the company is also working with celebrity builder Tommy Walsh to offer an affordable, eco-friendly house design –Tommy's House by Potton. In order to ensure quality across the company and increase efficiency, Potton has deployed the iGrafx Platform.

The Challenge

Potton is known for both quality and flexibility, which means customers can be confident that the timber frame kit they order will meet their exact requirements and specifications. Given that

there is a range of design types and styles, and an almost endless number of configurations that can be ordered, this poses a real challenge for the company.

This commitment to customer specifications is underpinned by Potton's accreditation under the International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9001: 2000 quality management system and the UK Timber Frame Association's Q-Mark Plus scheme. These accreditations require rigorous third party examination of manufacturing and supply operations before they can be awarded and are subject to ongoing surveillance visits to ensure continued compliance.

As with many family-run businesses, as the company grew, new processes were introduced but not captured and stored centrally. Instead, the knowledge was held by individual teams, which made it difficult to get a holistic view of the company and its processes. This in turn made it difficult to manage quality, see where improvements could be made and understand where there were inefficiencies.

The Solution

After examining the company in detail, Tina Nash, the Business Improvement Manager at Potton, decided that the only option was to map processes across the business to get a clear understanding of how everything worked and fitted together. To achieve this, she chose the iGrafx Platform.

"I have always used process mapping as a way to see clearly what's going on in a business," explained Nash. "People often think that they understand the company and how things work, but that's not always the case. Once the information's captured in a graphical



Potton Homes
Children's Care & Education

format, it is easy to see what's going on."

Nash chose the iGrafx Platform because it offered the ability to quickly and easily create process maps across the business, as well as the ability to drill-down and analyse individual elements in detail. The other important selection criterion was that the maps could all be made available to staff over the Web, so that everyone within the business could see and use them.

Having attended an iGrafx training course, Nash and her team initially mapped more than 70 processes across the company, covering all aspects of the business from initial sales enquiries through to delivery of kits and after sales service, and immediately began to see results.

The Benefits

"When we presented the process maps to the management team for the first time, there was a stunned silence," explained Nash. "The maps clearly showed every aspect of the company and how everything worked together in detail. That gave real food for thought around how to run processes across the business."

As a result of the iGrafx process maps being linear, Potton could examine its processes in detail and look where improvements could be made. These included whether certain processes could be run in parallel or their order changed. This led a reengineering of certain parts of the business, which enabled the company to reduce its lead time from 20 weeks to 12 weeks.

"The biggest initial benefit was a dramatic reduction in lead time, which we cut by almost half – we just couldn't have achieved this without the mapping and process decomposition capabilities of iGrafx," explained Nash.

The Potton quality management programme is now entirely paperless because it uses iGrafx. Every process is mapped and colour coded by department, so employees are able to drill down into the detail to understand their responsibilities and what they need to do when.

"Our quality management system covers everything from the initial customer enquiry through to delivery to site and support," explained Nash. "Not only does this mean everyone understands what's going on, helping us to maintain the quality we pride ourselves on, it is also a brilliant tool for explaining our very complex business to new recruits."

The process maps are all published to the Potton's company intranet, so the team can access and look at them whenever they need to, which means that everyone has a better understanding of the entire business and their role. It is also helping to drive ongoing efficiencies across the company.

"Even now, when there's a new process implemented or a problem, iGrafx is the tool of choice," concluded Nash. "It takes the politics out of any decisions, because it's the map or processes that are being challenged, rather than an individual or team. This has increased the speed of decisions, which has further helped us to improve efficiency and maintain quality."

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iGrafx

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