Don't MISunderstand the opportunity

A London-based direct marketing specialist recouped its MIS investment in just one year through increased efficiencies in linking its website to its production systems
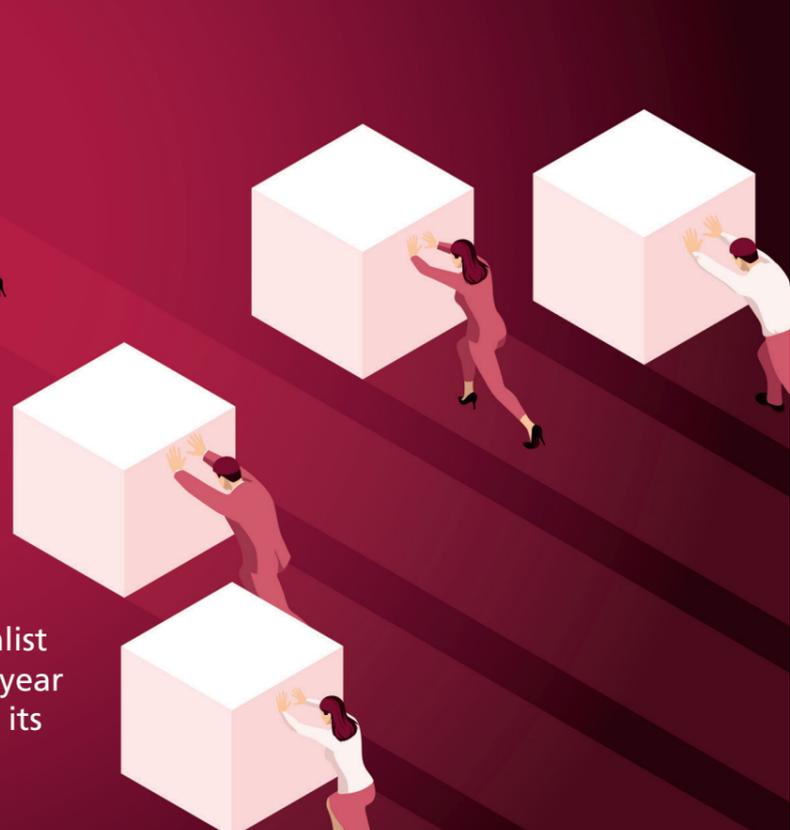
How does any company start? First comes a great idea, then the conviction that this idea could translate into a compelling product or service that could go further than the competition, and there's the opportunity? Or perhaps it's just a clear sense that a better customer experience could be delivered and as a consequence a thriving business could be built.

This was very much the case in 1995 when Lbox communications, or London Letterbox Marketing as it was then known, initially came to market, primarily as a door-to-door distributor of council publications for many of London's boroughs.

By developing a loyal network of distributors – as opposed to self-employed contractors – for leaflet and newspaper distribution, much greater control was possible. The business very quickly built a reputation as a quality print service provider within the public sector who could be trusted to deliver on the promise of 'order today and deliver door-to-door tomorrow' at a time when many other larger organisations could not. As the business evolved its direct digital print production capability; organisations such as Transport for London (TFL), Morrison Utility Services, Southern Water, Network Rail, Kier Construction and Lexington Communications become valued clients.

Fast forward to 2015 and a significant new chapter begins for the business with the appointment of David King as the new MD, hired to professionalise the business still further. Mr King explains, 'The owners had a vision to innovate and improve the overall customer experience by investing not just in hardware and printing devices but also in software, skills and automation in

order to really transform it. We sought to grow profitability but without increasing headcount, so it was clear we had to scale the business differently and find another way to create greater bandwidth and capacity. I am proud to say that in the last five years we have in the main achieved our goals, and software in different guises has been absolutely vital in order to fulfil those ambitions.'

Errors and Excel

So how did they do it? Mr King continues, 'Back in 2015, we used Excel for just about everything we did. Whether it was to raise a quote, manage a job list or create the contents for the invoice, everything was essentially done manually. The potential for errors to creep in and the need for constant cutting and pasting of information from the enquiry to the job to the invoice was our reality. We got the job done, but standing back and looking closely at our back office processes, I realised our inefficiencies were reducing profitability. I identified that we needed two key software investments: firstly software to automate, simplify and help us scale our back office production capability; then, critically, a brand new web portal that would make it much easier and quicker for our customers to interact with us and efficiently buy products and services.

'We invested in a third-party piece of software that started to help streamline some of our back office operation. However, it wasn't long before we realised that our brand-new website – which included a host of features that customers loved – could not actually be fully integrated with that software.'

'This was frustrating, because our new booking website put so much power into our customers' hands and started to transform our business, but our back-office systems were not keeping pace. Customers could now go online and get instant quotes, using an easy mapping function to quickly and easily draw and redefine the geographic area for a potential campaign in seconds, then book that order in straight away for a 24 hours turnaround service. The speed and intuitiveness of the site allowed clients to experiment with different 'what if' scenarios in order to match their budget.'

It was at this point that Mr King realised, 'In order to take us to the next level, I knew I needed a new, smarter MIS, one that definitely had the flexibility, integration and automation capability in equal measure to fully combine with our website; I did not wish to do everything twice.' It was with this in mind that he set out for The Print Show in September 2018 to find the type of MIS supplier that Lbox communications could properly partner with.

'When I spoke with Optimus I had already seen two other MIS companies who I must confess seemed in different ways a lot more focused on how their solution would need us to work, whereas the complete opposite was true of the Optimus team of Ed Carney and Lisa Sage,' he recalls.

'Both Ed and Lisa wanted to properly understand how I wanted the system

David King: 'we have saved a fortune in time and increased our profitability'

to work; what challenges I faced and the reasons behind my thinking. They properly took the time to listen to my requirements, whilst exploring some of my thought processes in order to clearly establish what was important to me. It is fair to say that I was then – as I am now – hugely impressed with the professionalism that the Optimus team displayed and this definitely provided me with a great deal of confidence.

'I saw firsthand that an Optimus dash MIS allows you great scope to create business rules, with logic and validation that you wish to employ to suit your company, not theirs! It really doesn't matter what it is you produce or what type of substrates you use, the system allows the configuration of the initial enquiry screens to accurately reflect what you do with the fewest clicks. You get to define the variables and can pre-answer everything else that is already known

about your own environment, however bespoke, to automatically create quotes, jobs and invoices within seconds.

'It was not long after that I was convinced that Optimus could handle all that I did: door-to-door distribution, all our Royal Mail postage options, all types of print, plus all of the related non-print activities which were all essential services that needed to be handled in the one MIS. Critically, this level of technical flexibility meant that Optimus, in combination with our website developer, was able to fully integrate all the initial features and functions that we wished to link between our booking site and the Optimus MIS.

'Since January 2019 we have been live with Optimus, enabling real-time cohesion between our website and back office. Everything that can automate does, including live customer status updates. The bottom line is we have saved a fortune in time, increased our profitability and performance and avoided the need to take on more staff. We would have had to have taken on at least two more staff at £25,000 minimum each per annum if we had not invested in Optimus. Over five years as an employer, those numbers start to really add up to substantial savings worth having. In year one alone we already recouped a full return on our investment.'

For more information on Optimus email: contact@optimusmis.com