
Interview with...

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On Selecting Software

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Marie Groupe Uniq is a significant part of the Southern Europe Region of Uniq plc, the chilled convenience food group focused on the value-added sector of the food industry and, in particular, the growing markets for convenience foods in both the United Kingdom and Continental Europe. Marie Groupe Uniq markets brands such as Marie, St Hubert, Paul Bocuse, Luang, and Le Fleurier. In 2004, they went through a Software Selection process with the help of independent Supply Chain Planning specialist, Hughenden.

Q: What was the objective of your project?

A: "The objective of the project was **the selection of Advanced Planning & Scheduling (APS) software**. We did not really have any issues to solve, but we were looking for a way to secure and document our processes to guarantee their performance. Obviously, we also wanted to improve our business results – but that was not the main motivation. Our business performance was in line with our objectives but we recognised that our situation was too fragile as it **relied heavily on people**. So we decided not to change the processes but to crystallise them using APS software."

Q: What were the key stages of the selection process?

A: "From the start of the project when we defined the Functional Requirements, we tried to involve all the people who would later be affected by the improvements. This way, we thought it would fully validate the selection process and software implementation. There is no doubt that we had the capability to define our process and that we were willing to acquire the know-how to define the Functional Requirements. Our problem was that we needed someone to assist us and teach us how to do it – but not to do it for us."

The **key steps in the selection process were as follows:**

- The initial study and the split of Planning and Scheduling;
- The documentation of the 'AS IS' process;
- The analysis of issues and opportunities;
- The description of the stages of our processes;
- The creation of the Functional Requirements document;
- The search and selection of a list of suitable software suppliers, based on initial literature;
- The issue of the Functional Requirements document to the software houses;
- The scoring and comparison of their responses;
- The software presentations;
- The reference site visits;
- The final choice and decision.

Q: You chose Hughenden to assist you and teach you the know-how you were after. What did you like about Hughenden's approach and methodology?

A: "The fact that we did it all ourselves! It was not someone else's words or decisions. As a consequence, we had the opportunity to learn and **take ownership of the results**. Do not get me wrong: we wanted to learn how to select software but not to create an internal centre of expertise. Hughenden gave us the opportunity to get fully involved in the project and they created the right state of mind for the business. What I mean is that people will still change jobs but this project will have been a valuable and motivating experience for them.

I enjoyed working with Pierre, Hugh, and Carol. To re-use a French retailer's strap line, I found that Hughenden are some kind of "**Agitateur d'idées**" (**catalyst for ideas**) and I like that! Carol is almost militant about it and she will not let you go if she thinks that you are not telling the truth!

I also found the workshops very beneficial – almost unforgettable! I was also impressed by the methodology and the way the **Functional Requirements document** was put together. Overall, I feel that Hughenden's approach is so unique that you either love it or hate it but you cannot stay cold!"

Q: According to you, how do software houses view the involvement of independent consultants?

A: "It may just be an impression but during the meetings with the software houses, I liked the fact that Pierre [of Hughenden] **was like my lawyer**: he did not take over from us but he was there to help us keep control of the situation. It was as if, instead of defending ourselves, we had taken a lawyer who knows the rules of the game. Thanks to his expertise, I really felt that **we were playing in the big league**, that we were taken seriously and that no-one could tell us any lies! I also have to say that all the software houses told us that the Functional Requirements document was very practical and user-friendly."

Q: Did anything surprise you in the Hughenden approach?

A: "In fact, there was no surprise because we had not chosen Hughenden at random. From the start, we knew their idiosyncrasies! Despite that, we gradually realised how much the consultants were true to the Hughenden difference. Usually, **most consultants would not 'push' as much**: they may feel invested with a mission but they would often feel that their work was done once the Functional Requirements were defined. With Hughenden, however, there is this real passion which means that their consultants go further and push to really create change. Hughenden is **not at all the typical image** that industry leaders would have of a consultancy!"

Q: What personal lesson are you taking from this experience?

A: "As usual, we were time pressured, because I would have loved to go into more depth during the phases where we looked at the Supply Chain philosophy, so I could have benefited more from the knowledge of Hughenden. The day I tire of working in industry, I will send you my CV! **Keep going, it is magical...**"

Want to go further?

No doubt you have thought about what functionality you need from new software. Is the list comprehensive? Have you prioritised it? Have you got a mechanism to log the various software evaluations and to compare the ratings?

To save you time and effort, Hughenden has developed a Functional Requirements database for selecting Supply Chain software (Planning, Scheduling, Forecasting, and Inventory Management). It has been praised by several leading software houses, and is designed to help you go through a faster and more robust selection process.

To find out more, contact us at info@hughenden.net