

BPI bags **big savings** with chris²¹

Following a period of acquisitions that saw it grow to become Europe's largest manufacturer of polythene film, bags and sacks, British Polythene Industries plc (BPI) has centralised payroll management across its eight UK processing sites. The Group replaced its three legacy payroll solutions with Frontier Software's chris²¹ (Complete Human Resource and Payroll Information System for the 21st century) to realise significant savings in terms of cost, time and efficiency.

Headquartered in Greenock, Scotland, BPI comprises six divisions – Films, Industrial, Consumer, Packaging Services, Stretchfilms and Recycled Products – as well as its Group operation. These divisions previously operated as autonomous businesses reporting to the Group HQ; each having their own finance teams incorporating payroll, plus separate terms and conditions for payment of employees.

Conscious of a considerable duplication of effort, BPI brought in William Sneddon (pictured below) as Group Payroll Manager to address the situation.

An audit conducted by William revealed that a full awareness amongst staff of the legislation governing payroll was lacking, and that there were three different payroll systems (IBM's AS400™, Payrite™ and

Pegasus Opera™) operating across eight manufacturing sites which, in turn, had a mix of pay policies – weekly, fortnightly and monthly, and pay-days on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays.

"Because it was such a diverse structure, it was difficult to obtain management reports and statistics. Additionally, the existing payroll platforms had no real reporting facilities, so we had to process everything via our AS400™ system located at the Group's IT facility based in Stockton-on-Tees – a very long-winded process," William recalls. In his report to senior management, he recommended centralising BPI's payroll, as well as rationalising the process across the Group by standardising on fortnightly pay, which would be paid on a Thursday.

To ensure that the optimum price/performance package was selected, BPI approached a number of leading software suppliers.

"We discarded two bidders straight away, purely on cost, and then whittled the remainder down to two – Frontier Software and Grampian," continues William. "Following a thorough review of both, we decided that Frontier Software, with its £11-million turnover per year (at the time) and far superior technical knowledge, could provide the solution."

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Group Payroll Manager, BPI

In March 2004, BPI purchased Frontier Software's chris²¹ platform – comprising Payroll, Personnel, Learning & Development, Recruitment, P11D reporting (UK), and Travel and Subsistence/Vehicles modules.

"BPI selected our chris²¹ solution for its advanced functionality, integrated approach and flexibility," states Frontier Software's Project Manager and Sales Consultant, Iain Pringle. "The sheer scope of the project called for a hands-on approach to implementation across the Group's divisions, therefore our training and consultancy was provided on site. Working closely with the BPI project team,

we were able to provide a flexible approach to rationalising multiple payroll systems into the Frontier Software platform.”

Implementation commenced in June 2004 under a multi-phased roll-out plan. BPI's Packaging Services division was the first to go live in October, followed by the others on an almost monthly basis. By March 2005, the system was operating across the entire Group.

Getting IT right

For BPI's Business Systems Consultant, David Barker, there are a number of key aspects to the Frontier Software solution. “chris²¹ was available in an SQL™ version, would operate in a thin-client environment, support our number of employees and, most important, support the divisional model,” he explains.

BPI has approximately 1000 thin-client terminals throughout its 26 sites operated by the six divisions, and served by the Group's data centre in Stockton-on-Tees. The data centre houses a large number of Microsoft Windows 2000™ servers running Citrix™ v.1.8, while a 2-8Mbps wide-area network (WAN) delivers applications to the remote, thin-client terminals as a shared resource. The legacy AS400™ system has been replaced and Microsoft's Navision™ v.3.6 ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) software is being implemented, which will allow BPI to export payroll costing reports directly from chris²¹ into the Navision™ accounts database.

The implementation of chris²¹ was smooth, although the sheer enormity of the task proved to be a major challenge – the manual effort of extracting multiple payrolls from the AS400™, Payrite™ and Pegasus Opera™ systems was, however, made easier by the bespoke import tool supplied by Frontier Software.



This import tool sits behind the application at the local sites where employees' hours are entered, and enables the data to be imported in a format compatible with chris²¹.

“We couldn't have done it in the timescale without the bespoke import tool, given the number of employees and payrolls,” says David.

chris²¹ wraps it up

“It was a fairly tight schedule,” admits William. “Maintenance fees for the old payroll systems were due in March, so that was our project completion date. The Frontier Software team was on site when each division went live to help us get to grips with the new system.”

According to William, one of the major benefits of chris²¹ is its flexibility in terms of compatibility with BPI's payroll

processes. Consolidation of 'paid-up-to' dates is one example, whereby hourly-paid employees have different 'paid-up-to' dates according to their shift patterns. chris²¹'s report writer feature has also proved invaluable, enabling 18 different tax reference numbers from the old payroll systems to be transferred onto a single record, which is produced each pay day.

“It was a fairly tight schedule”

Another key aspect for BPI is chris²¹'s screen-customisation facility. This allows the company to create its own screen format for its personnel database, while multiple database search options have increased user flexibility.

BPI now plans to leverage chris²¹'s HR and recruitment capabilities to improve the level of management information and enable integrated recruitment procedures (from vacancy through to issuance of job offer). “We have achieved savings on so many levels in terms of cost, time, efficiency and accuracy,” William concludes.