



progressive news

Spring 2010



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bisTrack 3.0 is here!

Gary Brookshaw introduces the latest version of the software



www.progressive-solutions.co.uk



Gary Brookshaw

bisTrack

Product Director, Gary Brookshaw, talks us through new features and some recent improvements within bisTrack as Version 3.0 of the software is launched...

Progressive Solutions – who we are



Runcorn houses the UK bisTrack team, including support, implementation, sales, marketing and admin.

Progressive Solutions was founded in 1989 in Vancouver, Canada to create software for the forest products industry. The UK operation was established in 2001. We've seen steady annual growth since the beginning and we believe it's thanks largely to our commitment to product innovation, customer-focused management practices and employee development. Today, more than 6000 users log on to Progressive's systems every day at more than 800 locations around the world.



Richmond, Vancouver is our HQ and houses sales, marketing, admin and finance functions.



Federal Way, Seattle (USA) home to the technical services team, and a world-class data centre.

Supporting them are 125 employees in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom. Len Williams, our President and CEO, says "To reach our 20th birthday, especially in the software industry, was an important milestone for us last year and a reflection of the hard work and dedication of all our employees. What we're most proud of however is just how far our products have come and how they're helping our customers survive and thrive in a difficult economy."



Vernon (British Columbia), home to HR, development and support services for Timber Track and North American bisTrack sales.

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Your business challenge? Our software solution!



bisTrack software is developed in the familiar Microsoft style to help construction industry suppliers become more efficient, more productive and more profitable.



The core product manages sales, controls stock, simplifies purchasing and gathers intelligence. And, as all sizes and types of company will testify, it's as relevant for a one branch business as a multi-site national operation.



Front cover photography: thanks to bisTrack user, Bedford Timber, for allowing us to use this photograph taken at their Kempston site.

Version 3.0 is here!

“Over the last three or four years we’ve continued to develop new features within bisTrack to deliver powerful functionality to our customers. In fact there are now more than 1000 system options which are used in different ways on customer sites across the UK, Ireland and North America every day. Today, although the software continues to evolve, our emphasis has shifted slightly away from new features into improving what’s already in the system. New software releases often include several hundred changes, from tiny tweaks to significant improvements which customers have asked for. For example, recent enhancements included the ability to customise order entry windows, which can be achieved using our new ‘Form Designer’ option to change the layout and order of fields. You can also choose the style in which you enter multi-line addresses now which can help you further down the line with reporting and analysis.

Order entry has also been improved by intelligent use of keyboard shortcuts and the order in which

you enter product information. If you need to scan in a number of barcode products and then enter a quantity, (or not, for single items) the whole process is now much quicker and slicker, as you’d expect in a retail environment. Performance across the system is continuously enhanced too. Since our last release, finding products is now significantly faster, depending on your particular configuration. Improvements of 30% have been recorded in some situations.

Recently, integration with Microsoft Outlook has been improved, to enable users to browse all or selected contacts from bisTrack in an Outlook address book. You can also send an email from Outlook and optionally add it, as well as existing emails, to the customer notepad (giving you traceability of contact). You can also add your customer notepad follow up dates and appointment dates into your Outlook Calendar, keeping all your information in one place.

New bisTrack features

bisTrack Version 3.0 includes some very significant new features. We’ve added an optional integrated CRM system, which we initially developed to track and manage our own customer and prospect base. It’s a powerful CRM (customer relationship management) system which is easy for all staff to maintain and, rather than just storing customer information, will help merchants define sales opportunities and manage marketing campaigns. The obvious advantage of using a CRM system within bisTrack is that it IS within bisTrack, where you already have all your customer data, eliminating the need to keep two sets of records.



Catalogues

Also launched within Version 3.0, our new optional Catalogues feature has been developed in partnership with the team from e-Xact, the online construction product database. bisTrack users who also subscribe to e-Xact will be able to use bisTrack’s ebusiness interface to move products between e-Xact’s catalogue and bisTrack itself, giving them access to thousands more products outside of their main product file - without impacting on bisTrack’s performance. The e-Xact database currently holds information on more than 150,000 products including codes, images, literature and other useful details such as volumetric data and waste packaging information.



I’ll be demonstrating these features and many more at our bisTrack 3.0 launch events in May.



bisTrack benefits Alsford Timber

bisTrack has delivered vastly improved stock control to Alsford Timber thanks to enhanced reporting capabilities which allow the company to accurately predict and manage the stock requirements of all 19 of its branches.

As well as this key improvement, margin has increased and staff are working more effectively on what is a highly intuitive system. Explaining why the time was right for Alsford to upgrade its business management system, Mr. Fuller said, "Our old system had been revised but was still simply not robust enough to take us to the next level. I needed greatly improved management information with reports that could be accessed at all levels. Using our old system meant we had to wait for reports but now we get them quickly and easily allowing users across the business to access data when they need it, in the format they need. Other key criteria included more effective stock control. £17m of stock moves through our head office site in any given year and £6 or £7m of that will be made up of inter-branch transfers. The opportunity for mistakes was therefore significant."

The benefits of bisTrack to Alsford's financial department also centre round the system's speed and flexibility of reporting, according to Financial Director, Stephen Perrin. He said, "The sheer scope and ease with which you can produce reports to analyse stock, customers, suppliers – every aspect of your business, is really impressive. They appear on my desk within minutes – and that's a great turnaround time."

"In particular bisTrack has given us a much more thorough knowledge about our core stock. We produce a report on the top 200 stock items independently for each branch, so they can see what they need to order and when, so they never stock out of their core ranges. We've also been able to closely analyse the financial impact made by the introduction of a range of heavy building materials, which is a new revenue stream for us.

Both Neil Fuller and Stephen Perrin are looking forward to integrating bisTrack further into the business over the coming year. In particular they plan to implement Web Track, the system's internet portal. "Our website is currently information only,"





Neil Fuller

explains Neil Fuller. "But with Web Track we will be giving customers something they can use. Many larger customers are already pressurising merchants to trade electronically and I see Web Track, not as an 'Amazon shopping basket' type facility, but more of a way of gaining incremental business from existing customers."

Rather than a yearly stock take, bisTrack will allow Alsford to move over to rolling perpetual inventory (PI) counts with programmed audit checks this year which, according to Neil Fuller, the external auditors are entirely happy with. The team are also planning to implement the system's journey planner module to manage deliveries more effectively.

Neil Fuller concludes, "We helped ourselves by getting bisTrack on board quickly and painlessly while business was slow, so we won't have the disruption as we start to implement a very aggressive three year strategic plan. Not only will bisTrack help us take all our staff to the next level, I now have 14 month's worth of accurate data in the system upon which I can base assumptions as we invest in new markets this year – and this gives me huge confidence as we go forward."

bisTrack on your iPhone

Seeing first-hand how merchants' customers could access their accounts anytime of the night or day via an iPhone was a highlight of a recent customer event held at Progressive House. This particular demonstration was set up to showcase the latest

version of the company's Web Track, which provides merchants with a customised internet portal through which their customers can trade or simply work with their accounts.



McMahon restarts roll-out programme despite recession

Originally founded in the 1830s in Limerick, James McMahon Ltd had become the largest timber supplier in Ireland by the early part of the 20th century. The company went on to widen its focus to include building materials and has more recently grown steadily through acquisitions both in the Republic of Ireland and in the North. Today the company is recognised as the largest and most successful independent builders' merchant across the island of Ireland.

Specific requirements from the new system, according to Mr Mulhall, were good margin management and stricter controls over user access to information. bisTrack delivered on both of these and also impressed the McMahon team with its ease of use.

The roll-out programme started during the summer of 2007 when all four Northern Irish branches went live on bisTrack at the same time. But the aggressive implementation programme for the remaining branches south of the border was suspended when the economic climate changed.

However during the second half of 2009, in spite of the continuing recession, Mr Mulhall decided to restart the rollout programme. He said "The group was still in an untenable position caused by the presence of three platforms, but we also believed the immediate benefits from using bisTrack, which we were seeing in our Northern branches, outweighed the savings we were making by not implementing the system in the remaining branch network."

"The most significant and immediate of these benefits was an improved visibility of information. In particular we were able to analyse and control

sales margins more quickly and accurately and have a far greater control over user access throughout the system."

The implementation programme is now well underway in McMahon's Southern Irish branch network with Letterkenny and Dublin already live on bisTrack.

In 2006 the two drivers behind a change in computer system at McMahon's were a desire for improved functionality as the company went forward, and the need for a common platform after the acquisition programme meant a total of three IT platforms were now in use throughout the group.

An initial shortlist of five systems was eventually narrowed down to a choice between bisTrack and one other and, according to Financial Director, Stephen Mulhall, when it came to functionality, either system would have performed. He explains, "The decision to go with bisTrack was based on the relationship we were developing with the Progressive team, a confidence in deliverability and their aggressive approach to the overall cost of the new group platform".

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"analyse and control sales margins more quickly and accurately"



bisTrack wows Palmer Timber!

Palmer Timber implemented bisTrack two years ago and has 26 staff using the system. Before bisTrack, the company was using a system which had not been set up to take any mill order processing into account as it was not flexible enough to work in the way the operations team wanted it to. Consequently, as soon as raw materials changed into another product, traceability was lost as far as stock control was concerned. Palmer's Kevin Edmonds remembers, "In terms of basic sawn stock, we had accurate figures, but to achieve accurate stock control across the business, we had to hold a time-consuming, full physical stock count every quarter as well as at year end. Frequently, we found that the actual stock count we came up with was different to what the system led us to expect. As soon as production started again after each stock count, our figures were out of date, so we couldn't actually use them in any meaningful way for management reporting."

Palmer's Finance Director, Peter Kerr, headed up the project team tasked to source new software. He explains, "During the selection process, it soon became obvious that bisTrack was the only system which was being developed and was going forward. In fact even between the two bisTrack demonstrations we had, some features had already been progressed. After the second demo we felt it was a system we were satisfied with – and it ticked most of the boxes."

Implementation took around nine months and the team also organised intensive staff training on the system before going live, which paid dividends according to Kevin Edmonds, "Progressive's Nick Rogerson, who handled our implementation, said we were one of the best prepared sites."

According to Kevin, the system's immediate big 'wow factor' was accuracy of stock. "We're regularly over 99% accurate now. Our auditors are so happy with the numbers that there's no longer a need to do year end stock counts, since we use a perpetual inventory system throughout the year. This was something we hadn't even targeted."

Operations Manager, Ian Cox, adds, "The sawmills are also more efficient now because of bisTrack. Salesmen used to put orders out assuming the stock was there. The sawmill would be geared up to machine a product but, when we went to fetch the



Kevin Edmonds, Ian Cox, Peter Kerr

raw material, it wouldn't be there. Now we can set up our machine schedules safe in the knowledge that stock shown on the system will be available. bisTrack allocates the source materials, assigns the process and records the finished product. We also use the stock location feature which lets us see exactly where stock is – in which shed, on the quay or being processed off site. And, because bisTrack is so flexible it also allows us to manage stock in both loose and pack quantities for timber and panel products."

Kevin Edmonds looks after timber purchasing and, before bisTrack, would have to spend the first three days of every month taking stock usage data off the old system manually and putting it into spreadsheets for forecasting purposes. Now, on bisTrack, he has a live six month purchasing schedule he can access at any time.

Peter Kerr continues, "Once we started building up information we could trust, we started seeing real benefits. If stock accuracy was the main benefit, then quality of management information was the next. We were able to use the system to accurately analyse the profitability of jobs and the results were often surprising. The system is actually helping us from a management point of view in confirming that the general direction we wanted the business to go in was correct. We now have solid data in the system to support our decisions to make changes. And, once we have made them, we now have the ability to measure the outcome of those changes."



75,000 miles and counting!

Richard Jones joined Progressive in 2007 as part of the company's first graduate sales team. During that time he's clocked up more than 75,000 miles for the company. Nothing will stop Richard getting to an appointment on time – this winter he drove from north Wales to Stockton-on-Tees in very bad snow – an eight hour journey. From there he continued to Beaconsfield – another seven hours – for a meeting at 9am the next morning! He said, "A few people thought it was stupid, however, I believe you should always try and get somewhere if you have promised to. Too many people say they will go the extra mile but then don't."

Richard says his role at Progressive has given him plenty of opportunity to develop and improve his skills and he is proud that bisTrack is now the



preferred choice for many merchants. "When I started we had a very good product which was being used by some of the top merchants. Since then we have continued to work hard to get bisTrack into the minds of merchants who are considering changing their business software. I am very confident that bisTrack is now widely accepted as the business software of the serious merchant."

Who's new to bisTrack?

Walter Tipper – Lichfield

Chandlers Building Supplies – Ringmer

Welland Valley Timber – Stamford

AK Timms & Sons – Oxfordshire

Yorkshire Timber – Halifax

MBM Speciality Forest Products – Shepperton

Amber Mills Timber – Derbyshire

Covers Timber & Builders Merchants – Chichester

Altripan UK Ltd – Ledbury

Be part of the solution with Progressive!

Progressive has joined the fast growing group of UK companies who have signed up to the 10:10 initiative to cut the UK's carbon emissions by 10% in 2010.

We take our corporate social responsibility very seriously and have always worked hard to make a positive impact in our local community. However, when it comes to finding a way to contribute positively to global issues, it can be a little overwhelming! This is why we were so excited when we heard about 10:10 as it offered us an achievable way of contributing towards resolving a planet-sized problem!"

Companies have to commit to getting as close to their own 10% target as possible – with a minimum cut of 3% – and to encourage customers, staff and suppliers to sign up too. For bisTrack users working towards their 10:10 target, modules such as Journey Planner can help them cut down on fuel emissions, there are features to help manage and demonstrate timber traceability, and Scan Track can deliver massive savings on stationery. There's more about the 10:10 campaign at www.1010uk.org



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This publication is printed on FSC approved paper.

