

Gerwyn Thomas | Partner | TL Thomas & Son

“ Implementing bisTrack software is probably the best change we’ve ever made to our business — and we’ve done it at just the right time. This is the view of Gerwyn Thomas, a partner at Carmarthenshire-based builders’ merchants, TL Thomas & Son, just two months after going live with bisTrack. ”

Case study

If there was an award for ‘best view from a builders’ merchants yard’, TL Thomas would win hands down. Gerwyn Thomas can also trace back seven generations of his family who have operated the business from the same site it occupies today, surrounded by Welsh farmland. The company grew from simple wheelwrights and undertakers, to carpentry and building contractors, until finally evolving into a builders’ and timber merchants business in the 1960s. Its sister operation, Teifi Timber Products Ltd, last year processed 30,000 tonnes of Welsh-grown timber, 40% of which was sold through TL Thomas — mainly as agricultural construction timber, fencing products and garden furniture. A total of 40 staff are employed over the two seven-acre sites.

### Need for a timber specialist

Gerwyn had read about bisTrack in the trade press and had spoken to industry colleagues who use the system before inviting Progressive’s Arthur Duffy to come and demonstrate the software on site. He explained, “We looked at a couple of other systems, but not seriously. What I really wanted was a system which would cope with our timber products. They’re all tally products and we sell mostly in cubic metres or ‘each’, so the conversion between cubic metre, linear metre and ‘each’ in bisTrack really helps us. Further to a conversation with a colleague in the timber trade who uses bisTrack to manage sales and stock at his timber yard, I was reassured that it could do what I wanted.

“At the demo we were also impressed with how easy it was to use, particularly for counter sales. Our staff had no problems learning and using bisTrack, even those with little computer experience. The search facility is particularly good, especially the way you can find a customer by entering any part of his contact details, even just part of his mobile phone number!”

Before implementation, TL Thomas took on a new member of staff who produced an Excel spreadsheet of all 5,000 product lines. Then, with hardware installed and product and customer data on the system, they decided to run bisTrack alongside the manual system for three months so staff would feel totally confident with account and cash sales procedures.

Immediate benefits for the sales staff included the ability to find related documentation when customers returned products. “No one ever brings any paperwork back with them in this part of the world”, explained Anwen, “but the related documents feature means it’s easy for us to see when a product was bought, how much the customer paid and the discount we gave. The system has enabled all the office and counter staff to work in a totally different way now, and much more quickly. Everything used to be so time consuming.”

Discount structures for different categories of account customer are being set up. Gerwyn said, “We’d done this before of course, but the information was all just in our heads! Now everyone uses the same structure. Price lists are also being produced directly from bisTrack for individual categories, which are automatically updated when prices change in bisTrack.”

### TL Thomas & Son

Before bisTrack was installed, TL Thomas ran a totally manual sales, invoicing and stock control system, with Sage managing the back office accounts. Stock-takes took several weeks and the business had no effective system of analysing or controlling stock movement.

The rural location of the business, the large proportion (60%) of DIY sales, and numerous small trade accounts mean that TL Thomas produce high volumes of small value invoices. For partner, Anwen Lloyd-Thomas, in charge of accounts, this meant daily pricing-up of invoices after business hours, to keep the Sage system updated. She said, “The first major benefit we noticed was the time we’d saved at the end of the first month — with bisTrack producing all the invoices neatly priced-up and ready for us to send out!”

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### Cutting edge expansion

Gerwyn plans to implement bisTrack in the sawmill business later this year, a customer database is already installed and work has started on product and price lists. A couple of users will input stock on terminals at the mill site, whilst the sales side will be handled from the TL Thomas office. Gerwyn says he's confident bisTrack has the flexibility to manage the conversion of timber packs for stock control and all the machining permutations they offer.

Overall, Gerwyn says he feels he has a much better grasp on the business since bisTrack was installed. "bisTrack's dashboard view is a big plus as it lets me keep a 'minute by minute' eye on the company's performance. I also like the warnings you get if something is sold below margin, and how I can quickly see why it's happened. The pop-up messages, alerting you when back-to-back orders have come in so you can let your customer know, are also excellent.

"I've also started using some of the reporting functionality. I like to look at performance on a monthly basis, comparing it with last month and tracking sales throughout the year. It's also a big plus being able to produce a stock valuation report instantly and now, for the first time, reports can highlight my 'dead stock' so I know what I need to put on offer to make room for things we can turn round.

"bisTrack also makes it easy for me to keep track of cost prices. With the market remaining uncertain, it's much easier for me to see the average cost of a product over a period, so I can plan and be more proactive on selling.

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