

CPI Interactive Enables Sunrise Growers to Maintain their Competitive Edge and Grow their Business 20 Percent Per Year



"Our sales of strawberries have increased by 20 percent each year for the last several years. We couldn't have accurately tracked our sales and inventory pipeline without our sales reporting system deployed by CPI Interactive. It has truly been a lifesaver for us."

-- Steve Circle, Director of Sales, Sunrise Growers

Organization:
Sunrise Growers

Industry:
Agribusiness

Location:
Placentia, California

Applications:
Real-time sales/inventory reporting system

Solution Set:
Microsoft SQL and Windows Server 2000
AcuODBC Server
Macromedia ColdFusion

CPI Interactive provided:
Integration Services



BUSINESS CHALLENGE: As one of the largest strawberry growers in the nation, Sunrise Growers has always relied on cutting edge science and technology to help them deliver the best possible product to the market. Their success in the industry recently brought them face to face with a difficult challenge that even the latest innovations in agriculture science and farming technology could not address.

"As our strawberry business and sales flourished, we began shipping out of multiple districts, which increased the potential for complex sales order changes throughout the day," explained Ben Bowden, Director of Information Technology at Sunrise Growers.

"It became more and more difficult to manage our sales and inventory pipeline. Our legacy systems and traditional tools were no longer adequate to help us make decisions on how to best fulfill our orders and the expectations of our customers."

The process that Sunrise had traditionally used to keep track of produce and sales relied on spreadsheets and data from a legacy computer system entered by hand. This process was slow and labor intensive. It was also prone to error.

"The static paper reports from our legacy system were not giving us data in real time, so our spreadsheets never had the most current data," said Bowden. "When you're working with many different orders by the minute, many of which will be changed throughout the course of the day, not having real-time information about the availability of your product is a huge issue."

Because of the inaccuracies inherent to any manual system, the sales team was always working from old data, a situation that led to what they call "shorts" and "longs," or shortages and surpluses of fresh fruit.

"Strawberries are highly perishable, so when they come in from the fields, they need to be cooled and loaded on the truck that same day," Bowden explained. "Ideally, we don't want to have any holdover for the next day, nor do we want to run short. As our business increases, we continuously need new technology that helps us reach that goal and drive up our bottom line."

WHY CPI INTERACTIVE? Sunrise Growers turned to CPI Interactive, an advanced technology e-business solution provider, for the answer to this increasingly urgent business challenge. CPI Interactive began by performing a complete needs assessment of the functional and interface requirements of the project.

A key requirement was the ability to interface with Sunrise's accounting application designed specifically for the agriculture and produce industries by Famous Software of Fresno, CA. Because Famous Accounting was written in COBOL, CPI Interactive's first step was to locate an ODBC driver that would enable them to link to the COBOL source code and extract data. With this in place, CPI Interactive set up an SQL database on a Microsoft Windows 2000 Server, where extracted data could be stored. The last step was to create a Web portal that sales people could access when they needed real-time data. For this component, CPI Interactive used Macromedia's ColdFusion to design a user-friendly interface.

The final solution delivered by CPI Interactive, known today as the Sunrise Growers' Sales Reporting System, collects pertinent order information from Famous Accounting and transfers it into the SQL database. The Web-based front end of the Sales Reporting tool summarizes orders by district, pack and day of the week, going out 14 days.



The Sunrise Growers Sales Reporting System, implemented by CPI Interactive, provides accurate tracking of the company's sales and inventory pipeline, and has helped Sunrise Growers expand its business each year.

"If there is a change in an order, it's automatically and immediately changed in the sales report. The Sales Reporting System also displays the direction that we need to take with the pack plan and with pricing."

"Our productivity and efficiency are better than ever before. We can respond to customers more quickly and more accurately."

"The people at CPI know our systems and how we do business. This gives them a unique advantage in helping us bring together all our legacy systems."

"If I want to see what is going on in Santa Maria, I can easily display the orders in that area and compare them to what is actually being packed in that district," said Steve Circle, Sunrise Growers' Director of Sales. "If there is a change in an order, it's automatically and immediately changed in the sales report. The Sales Reporting System also displays the direction that we need to take with the pack plan and with pricing."

"CPI Interactive did an outstanding job handling the technical details and programming of the system," said Bowden. "They did an equally good job on the visual aspects of the user interface. Unlike our old system, the new real-time reporting system is very easy to use."

NO MORE SPOILED STRAWBERRIES: It's a big job to sell approximately 9 million trays (or approximately 80 million pounds) of strawberries per year. According to Circle and Bowden, it's a job that the Sunrise sales staff could not easily achieve without the Sales Reporting System implemented by CPI Interactive. During the busy growing season, when sales reps work 12-hour days, most of them also access the system from home, via the company's secure VPN.

According to Circle, the benefits of CPI Interactive's solution were obvious from the very beginning. "Our productivity and efficiency are better than ever before. We can respond to customers more quickly and more accurately. This helps us move our product, which reduces operational costs and adds to our bottom line."

Circle and his staff consider the sales reporting solution from CPI Interactive to be a key tool in helping them make better business decisions. "I now know whether I am going to be short or long on product a couple of weeks out, and I can make needed adjustments according to supply and demand," Circle explained. "This capability enables our company to compete more effectively in a very tight perishable fruit market."

FUTURE DATA WAREHOUSE CONSOLIDATION: Sunrise doesn't intend to rest on its laurels. Just as they constantly seek better ways to produce strawberries, the company is also looking toward future opportunities that will enable them to maintain their competitive position in the industry.

IT Director Bowden is already working on the next phase of automation, including a data warehouse that will consolidate data from many different legacy systems spread among growing facilities 500 miles apart. At the front end will be a data analysis tool to aid managers in making decisions in all areas of enterprise resource planning.

Bowden is counting on the development team at CPI Interactive, which he considers to be a valuable extension of his own IT resources, to play a part in this endeavor. "The people at CPI Interactive know our systems and how we do business," Bowden said. "This gives them a unique advantage in helping us bring together all our legacy systems, from A to Z and from Baja, California to Watsonville, into a single, centralized data repository."

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BENEFITS TO THE ORGANIZATION

- The sales team now has real-time access to critical pipeline information: expected inventory, actual inventory, available inventory, projected sales, actual sales
- Replacing the manual process of tracking receipts and sales enables Sunrise to manage more inventory and expand sales more easily
- CPI's Web-based solution enables the Sunrise sales team to work from home during 12-hour work days during the busy growing season
- Changes in orders are automatically reported for immediate attention and assessment of impact on the fruit packing plan
- More accurate and timely pipeline data means less holdover and waste, fewer shortages and more competitive pricing
- Real-time display of inventory and sales facilitates better decisions, ongoing oversight and immediate management intervention when needed