

# Stock management process simplified through effective report mining

As the largest independent commercial stationer in Scotland, the Aberdeen-based Langstane Press owes its success at least in part to the economies of scale which are possible when a business of its size is purchasing stock from wholesalers and manufacturers. But being able to source stock at optimal prices is only one side of the coin. There is also a fortune to be lost by inefficient stock control and record keeping. Holding high levels of slow moving stock, for example, ties up working capital and impacts negatively on profitability.

Computer-based stock control systems have evolved over the decades to support businesses like Langstane, which could be holding upwards of 20,000 line items of stationery and furniture in its operations at Aberdeen, Dundee and in Edinburgh (the company also runs a commercial printing business). Such systems set out to be omniscient, giving management a minute-by-minute picture of stock as it leaves the warehouse on route to a customer and flagging up ordering requirements against agreed mini-max stock levels.

## Too much data to handle

If those stock control systems have a failing, it is in the volume and diversity of information they provide. It is easy for stock managers to become inundated with data at a level which prevents them from filtering out the key information on which their commercial viability will hinge.

That was certainly the experience of Eddie Butler who has been associated with stock control management at Langstane goes back to the mid-'90s. He was running the company's Progress stock control package on a server-based DEC Vax super-mini and had

become increasingly aware that, while the quality of the reports generated by the system was inherently high, the content of these files was inflexible.

"The individual reports had a role but did not provide the depth of information I was looking for: to achieve that would have meant marrying up three or four different reports so that I could focus on the stock issues that really mattered.

"I had been introduced to Datawatch Monarch by a colleague and it was immediately apparent that it could provide the information we really needed. By drawing together pertinent information from multiple reports in Progress, we could identify potential problem areas and act upon them."

## Aid to warehouse management

Mr Butler, whose career has evolved into IT support, identified another aspect of warehouse management for which Monarch has proved effective. "The annual stock-taking generates volumes of paper which would otherwise have to be analysed by hand. We use Monarch to pot down the data from the stock-taking reports and apply this to a spreadsheet to make the task much more



manageable. There is a time factor as well – we estimate that the time to completion is reduced by at least 15%."

While the stock control package is still running on the Digital Vax computer under the VMS operating system, the system is now front-ended by PCs handling Microsoft Excel and Access. It could be argued that the ability of Monarch to work with a combination of legacy and current generation technologies is a significant asset to Langstane, which can protect its systems investment while making the most appropriate use of the information being generated.

## Progressive updates

Eddie Butler took up that point. "The fact that Monarch has been updated progressively over the years since we first acquired it means that the technology is never out of date and we are always able to extract the information we need. Monarch provides a highly flexible interface between the different components of the complete system, allowing us to harness the information to achieve the precise answers we need to run the business as factors change in the marketplace." §