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### Integrated Infor VISUAL System Helps Transform Business For Contract Manufacturer AWS Electronics

Within less than seven years a manufacturing management system from Infor Global Solutions has helped AWS Electronics Limited, a full-service British contract electronics manufacturer, to build its business from a turnover of £4m to £12m and from fifteen to twenty-seven customers, accompanied by a number of major benefits. These include better engineering change control, more accurate and faster materials traceability, plus the holy grail of higher productivity.

Derek Fulluck is managing director of AWS Electronics, a manufacturer established 30 years ago in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire. Joining the company in 1997, when it was acquired from its founder, his previous career had been with UK computer maker ICL. There he had managed several business units and installed the corporations own manufacturing management software. He knew a lot about such systems and what he wanted from them.

Coming to AWS Electronics he found a company with great potential, but it was run on a Pegasus accounting package, spreadsheets and manual methods. This had to change if his ambitions for the business were to be realised. His team looked at several leading suppliers of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, one of which was VISUAL Enterprise, now a product owned by Infor Global Solutions.

The VISUAL Enterprise system stood out as being best for AWS Electronics requirements. It was already used by a number of manufacturers in the electronics sector. The established nature of the supplier and its well-developed product capabilities also appealed, coupled to competitive price in relation to essential functions. A range of fully integrated financial, engineering and manufacturing modules promised better communications, sharing of information and decision-making. Its industry standard technology and ability to be readily scaled up as the business grew swung the decision.

#### Integrating the company

Integration and fast, accurate sharing of data matters a lot to AWS Electronics. On an outsourced basis not only does it make for customers in different sectors, but it also designs, develops, procures parts and materials, assembles and tests a variety of sub-assemblies and complete products. Repetitive contract and project work ranges from producing complex cable sets, printed circuit boards (PCBs) and related assemblies to finished goods such as satellite base station units and sophisticated vending machines. The company is familiar with the demands of the scientific instrumentation, medical equipment, aerospace and defence, transport and telecoms industries. It

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provides a competitive, all-embracing service that includes third party logistics (3PL) support and other attributes valued by the market. As a result, fast access to common data by all parts of the business is essential: everyone has to know what is happening, what they have to do and by when.

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The companys services are well supported by investment in advanced design, production and test equipment. Electronics manufacture is one of the worlds most aggressive industry sectors, which is why state-of-the-art surface mount technology (SMT) and automated pick-and-place machines populate a substantial part of the 48,000 square foot shop floor, complemented by related robotic systems and skilled manual processing where necessary. Intense quality assurance including 6 Sigma and 5S management techniques are also applied, plus lean manufacturing principles and an array of top-level training standards.

AWS Electronics thrives on tackling large and complex assemblies and products, reflecting its can do attitude proclaimed in company presentations. That said, the company sticks to what it does best, contracts and projects comprising low-volume production runs of tens of thousands of units, rather than mass-production. Its assembly lines are geared to both batch production and flow manufacturing. Derek Fulluck brought in consultants to introduce lean methods and JIT plus kanban are used harmoniously alongside more conventional methods, including IT. Typically, PCBs are made using a mix of demand-pull lean, plus push-based materials requirements planning (MRP), the latter provided by VISUAL Enterprise.

Higher productivity and other benefits

Fulluck has a strong management team with equally competent project management skills, but clearly AWS Electronics uses more than human resources to successfully fulfil orders. IT plays a key role, which is where the Infor system comes in. Installed in early 1998 and routinely upgraded, it continually and reliably provides essential support to managers and operators in a number of vital areas. These include financial control, MRP, stock and work in progress (WIP), purchasing and sales, engineering and related engineering change records.

Many other benefits are manifest. As the business expanded, the system has allowed AWS Electronics to increase the number of BOMs and related part numbers (32,000 in real time, of which 8,000 are in stock at any one time) it is able to handle. More suppliers can be managed and the company now has 450 it works with.

Productivity, the rod that British industry is often beaten with, is well up in key areas such as purchasing, finance, WIP, and order book management. Engineering changes are highly controlled and for customers requiring it, VISUALs traceability module simplifies the otherwise time-consuming task of tracking audit trails.

Part of these gains have been possible due to the Infor systems ease of use. Information is displayed and organised in a highly graphical form. Staff are able to quickly understand and act accordingly: no one finds using the system a problem. Forty personnel now use it concurrently, up from eight when first installed.

Infor is central to all our planning and operational controls, said Derek Fulluck, from initial customer order and bill of materials (BOMs) through to accounting and historic traceability - VISUAL is our 'Bible. It provides vital data analysis to help manage our

complex business.

Replacing a combination of software and manual methods by a fully integrated IT resource to support business expansion, the system has addressed other issues. As Fulluck puts it, its ability to address mile-wide, inch deep business tasks with a minimum level of overhead resources is important. It has also allowed the company to manage individual, small batch assemblies and material procurements as projects, a significant advantage.

As managing director a function that he finds especially valuable is the VISUAL EIS module. Based on an instrument panel it produces rolling twelve-month analyses of trends happening in the business. Fulluck is just beginning to use it and says Infor also offers a more advanced business intelligence package. He may bring that in later, but for now the function he has is a great step forward.

Although wholly compatible with office administration and related software (Infor VISUAL incorporates Microsoft technology), AWS Electronics has not yet needed to link the system to others, except one. This is an interactive customer service function residing on the companys website. Accessed by password, customers may review the status of their outstanding order book, check delivery records and monitor any quality issues. This may be done at any time, from anywhere and with any device that has a connection to the internet. VISUAL provides that system with real time information. Both current and prospective customers value the ability to view real-time, un-sanitised data, said the companys Mark Howitt, Business Development Manager.

More than a technology partner

As a reliable service partner itself, Infor has brought benefits in relation to software upgrades, training support, advice on various options, or new methods of operating the system, and the inevitable bug interpretation and fixing that is part of IT.

There is absolutely no doubt that AWS Electronics would not have been able to expand our business scope, capabilities and markets, in the way we have, without an effective ERP system, Fulluck concludes. VISUAL has provided an affordable entry-level and development path which matched our technical needs and ambitions. We look forward to continuing our success with the support of colleagues at Infor, well into the future."

The market will undoubtedly become tougher and contractors cannot stand still. AWS Electronics aims to keep on enhancing its service to customers and pursuing higher levels of performance. In this regard, due to its scalability and the suppliers policy of constant improvement, Derek Fulluck sees VISUAL Enterprise as continuing to be a key asset to the company.

About Infor

Infor is the largest global software provider exclusively focused on delivering world-class enterprise applications to select verticals in the manufacturing and distribution industries. Infor delivers integrated best-in-class products that address the essential challenges its customers face in areas such as supply chain planning, relationship management, demand management, ERP, warehouse management, marketing-driven distribution and business intelligence. More information about Infor and its products

can be found at [www.infor.com](http://www.infor.com).

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