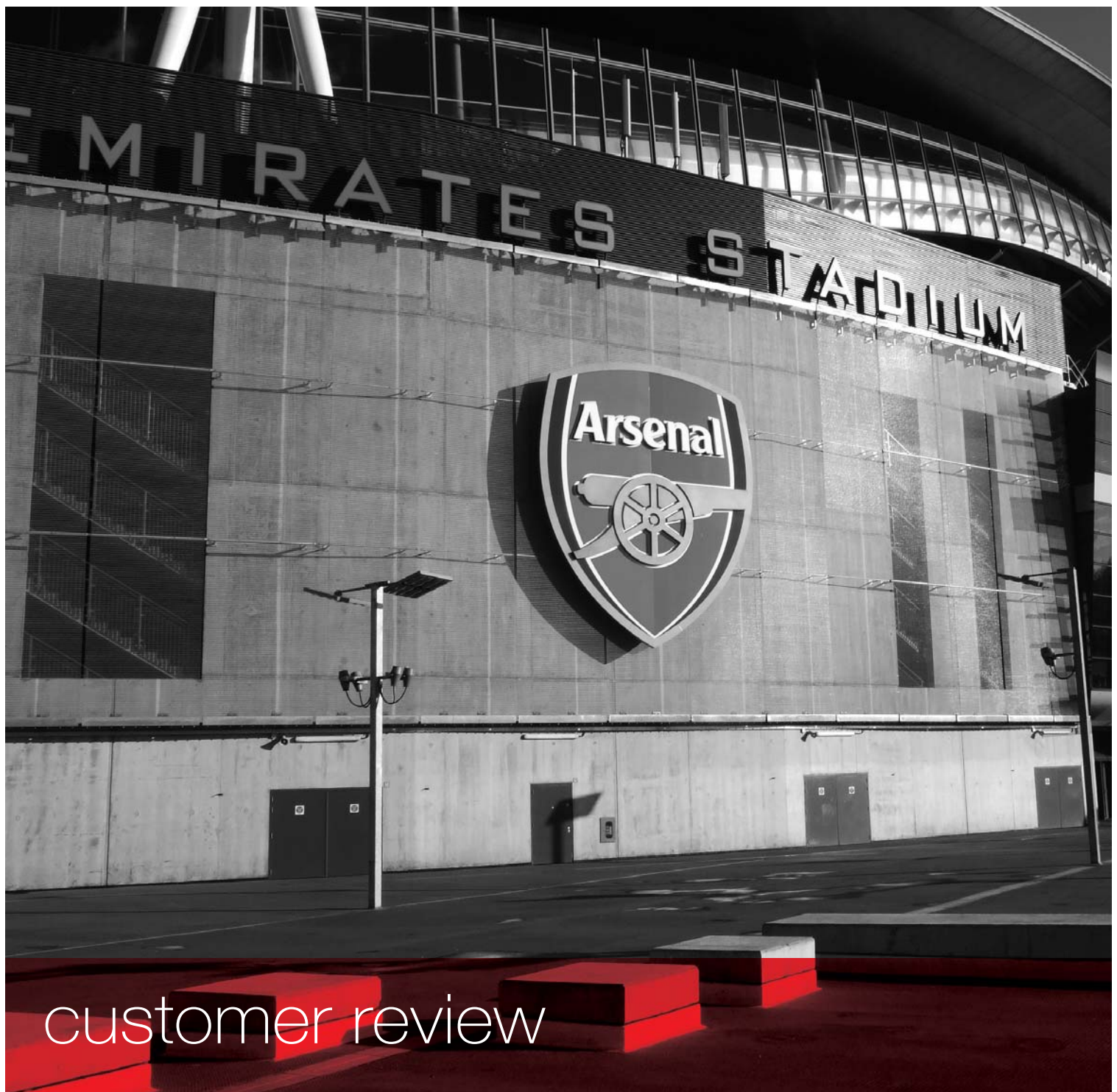


“As the business has grown, life’s certainly become more hectic for everyone. Once upon a time, I could absorb most of the Sage support issues; now there are just not enough hours in the day. Fortunately, I’m able to hand over plenty of the day-to-day support to Datel, so I can focus more on the business.”

Justin Irvine

IT Manager

Irvine-Whitlock Limited, Bedford



customer review



“Everything has integrated together pretty seamlessly to give us exactly what we need. Through Datel, we’ve actually been able to influence product development at VI Software.”

Justin Irvine is IT Manager at Irvine-Whitlock Limited, a specialist subcontractor in the UK construction market. Established in 1963, the company has grown in size and scope but still maintains its head office in Bedford. Although the workforce of operatives fluctuates week by week as project requirements change, as many as 800 people can be employed at any time. Turnover has also risen dramatically in recent years from £32 million in 2005 to £58 million in 2007.

The company’s skill set covers natural and reconstituted stonework, bricklaying and blockwork. Landmark projects include the Trafford Centre, Canary Wharf and Arsenal’s Emirates Stadium. Award-winning work at St Pancras Station was described as ‘the finest evocation of brickwork’ the judges had ever seen.

Involvement in large commercial projects has to a certain extent insulated Irvine-Whitlock from the housing market downturn affecting many construction companies. However, nothing is left to chance. The company looks to Datel to ensure that its accounting system continues to support a multi-faceted business in a highly competitive sector.

How has your IT evolved over the years to meet the demands of a rapidly growing business?

We started off with a UNIX-based ERP system from Multisoft, later acquired by Sage. When this product reached its end of life as a technology and support was withdrawn, we moved to Sage Line 200. That would have been in spring of 2003.

I should point out that this decision didn’t go through ‘on the nod’; I’d spent a lot of time reviewing the market and talking to others in the industry. However, a Sage Line 200 Contracting solution offered a good balance of construction-specific features utilising VI Software modules, and general accounting functionality, without compromising on either.

This system stood us in good stead, but subsequently we took the opportunity to move to Sage Line 500 alongside an upgrade to Microsoft Windows 2003 and SQL server. Sage Line 200 is, in effect, a scaled down version of Sage Line 500, so the move wasn’t as much of a leap as might first appear. We saw it as a natural evolution for us.

How has the business benefited generally from using Sage Line 500?

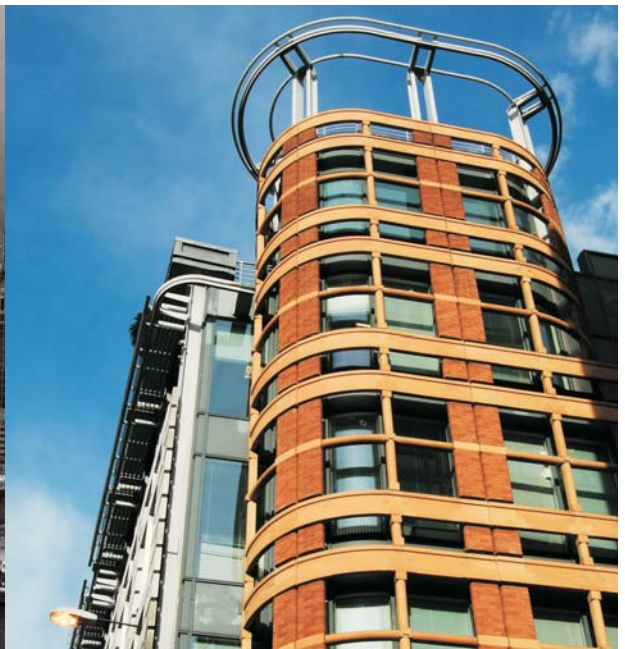
In a complex business like ours, you can end up with too much information. What we value about Sage Line 500 is its power in letting us get to the heart of what matters most to our business. Summarising all the information and boiling it down to essentials creates meaningful intelligence for our contract managers and surveyors.

With the old Multisoft system, managers had to wade through a massive stack of dot matrix print-out once a month. It could be an overwhelming task. That’s all been swept away. At any point in time, managers can get an at-a-glance overview of all the costs, actual, budgeted and pending on a single spreadsheet, and can then drill-down to analyse any particular job in detail. They can readily explore any anomalies – for example, does spend on plant look unusually high?

The real strength of Sage is that at the end of the day all the information is there on the Microsoft database, which you can then plug into using various means. I’ve developed no end of spreadsheets that go in and drag out exactly the information needed by managers, in the formats they want. I reckon I’m asked for a new type of spreadsheet a couple of times a month now, as managers realise the potential.

Are there any specific examples of tasks which have been made easier or more efficient?

We streamline our use of data wherever possible to avoid having to re-enter. We have a database where we track employees’ training and



certifications. That links to Sage Payroll, so we need to hold just the one record of names and addresses. As soon as someone is added to the payroll, they're on the training and certifications database.

This type of integration saves time and is so much neater. We're constantly on the look out to eliminate inefficiencies across the business. For example, we're just about to go live with a new VI Software module that will allow us to import timesheet data directly from spreadsheets. Up to now, one of my team has dedicated every Tuesday morning to manually keying in timesheet data. Remember, we could have upwards of around 500 operatives working for us in any week, so this could be quite a challenge.

The new functionality should prove a real time-saver, with the job taking five minutes rather than five hours. Nikki will be able to spend her time on more productive tasks and it's also meant that we haven't had to hire in a temp to help out during the holiday period.

Handling large projects means we may have only around 20 sales orders a month. But in contrast, we're very heavy on the purchasing side: 1,000 to 1,500 orders a month go through, with associated delivery notes and invoices. To handle this process, we've done some clever stuff with the Version One DbForm, DbMail and DbFax products that link to Sage Line 500.

We used to have to write out purchase orders by hand on multi-coloured pads and send them round the office for signing. Now a PO is entered directly through Sage Line 500 and the documents are sent via email, fax or post using Version One. Through this automated process the surveyor is sent an email, the site is faxed and the supplier receives a copy by their preferred mechanism.

All this didn't happen on day one. It's been a gradual process, but to me this is testament that the system can evolve in line with changing business needs. The development work goes forward as we evaluate

other opportunities. We hire in over £1 million of kit a year, so plant hire software is a strong possibility in the foreseeable future.

Has adding in third-party products been a complicated route to go?

No, everything has integrated together pretty seamlessly to give us exactly what we need, and, of course, we've been able to draw on Datel's skills. It's been a symbiotic relationship, too: through Datel, we've actually been able to influence product development at VI Software.

It sounds as if time is a resource in short supply at Irvine-Whitlock.

As the business has grown, life's certainly become more hectic for everyone. So, for example, once upon a time, I could absorb most of the Sage support issues; now there are just not enough hours in the day. Fortunately, I'm able to hand over plenty of the day-to-day support to Datel, so I can focus more on the business.

Looking back, how have you seen the relationship with Datel develop?

In fact, we were originally with another Sage Business Partner, whom Datel acquired in early 2007. However, the same team remained in place, so there was continuity in both account management and support.

With the passage of time, you might wonder if Datel would begin to take our business for granted. In fact, the reverse has happened. The Datel team has provided the in-depth knowledge and expertise to support us as we have expanded the core system to bring new functionality on board.

It's been a great support to our continued success to be able to draw on Datel's expertise and experience.

“The Datel team has provided the in-depth knowledge and expertise to support us as we have expanded the core system to bring new functionality on board.”

The Datel logo consists of the word "Datel" in white, bold, sans-serif font, centered within a solid red square.The Sage logo features the word "sage" in a lowercase, green, sans-serif font.

Business Partner

A large version of the Sage logo, with the word "sage" in green, lowercase, sans-serif font.

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About Datel

Datel is Sage's largest Business Partner in the UK and is acclaimed as its leading systems integration specialist. Headquartered in Warrington, Datel also has offices in Leeds and the Netherlands employing a loyal team of over 140 highly-skilled people who look after its growing base of over 800 customers worldwide.

We specialise in Sage 200, Sage Line 500 and Sage 1000, Sage CRM and SalesLogix as well as our own in-house products which we have developed to integrate with, and sit alongside, Sage solutions. Known as Datel FUSION, the suite of products enhances and extends the functionality provided by the core Sage applications.

Datel looks after a broad ranging base of customers including those in distribution, manufacturing, construction and the food and drinks sectors. Typically they are mid sized companies who rely upon Datel to make the most of their investment with Sage.

We pride ourselves in our approach to doing business. We seek to know and thoroughly understand our customers and their businesses so, in turn, we can appreciate fully all of the issues and challenges they face. Only then can we presume to offer a solution that will make a real difference to the way they do business. Everything Datel does is guided by our belief in providing only the very best in customer service. To find out more about our products and services, visit our website at www.datel.info

The Irvine Whitlock Solution:

- **Business Management Software**
Sage Line 500 providing financial and purchasing processes and HR support for 10 users
- **Integrated VI Software Modules**
Ensuring seamless management of contract procedures within one integrated system
- **Document Management Software**
Including Version One DbForm, DbMail and DbFax