

## PREMIER FOODS

UK's largest food company comes up with a winning recipe for Finance Shared Service Centre training



The success of the Premier Foods migration to a shared service centre for its financial operations would depend upon the recruitment and training of nearly 200 newly appointed staff. During the 12 month set-up phase, specialist training provider Floatdene Green equipped each member of staff with a targeted learning programme, designed to ensure the effective transition of processes to the new shared service centre, with minimal disruption to the wider business.

### SUMMARY

- New finance shared service centre based in Manchester
- 200 newly appointed staff
- 12 month training programme
- Blended learning approach covering company induction through to business process training.



Premier Foods has become a dominant force in the food manufacturing industry, accumulating great British brands from Hovis and Mr. Kipling, to Quorn, Bisto and Paxo. With a turnover of £2.6bn and around 16,000 employees, the last few years of the Premier Foods story has been all about acquisition and subsequent integration, as the business has pursued a strategy of relentless growth to become the UK's largest food producer.

Taking advantage of the opportunities presented by this growth was the impetus behind the establishment of Premier Business Services (PBS), a new Shared Service Centre in Manchester. David Rattigan, Director of PBS explains: "We were operating many different finance departments spread around the UK, each operating distinct business processes based upon legacy systems and SAP, and each addressing pockets of the overall finance processing workload. PBS was envisaged to enable the consolidation of key administration activities which until then had been managed on a multi-site basis. This would ultimately drive performance, quality and more efficient business processes while providing a solid foundation for the swift integration of future acquisitions."

The launch of PBS was announced in October 2008, with implementation starting immediately. Within one year, Premier Foods intended to create a purpose-built facility with 200 newly recruited staff. It was clear that the project would present significant training challenges. "We were focused upon the new office and the new IT infrastructure, but were extremely conscious that the recruitment and training process for those individuals - most of whom would be completely new to the Premier Foods organisation - would be equally critical," added Rattigan. "Finance staff would be leaving the business during the same period, and we needed to entrust the necessary transitions and associated knowledge transfer to an experienced training partner.



"It was clear from the outset that the PBS project was very ambitious in scope, and would require a great deal of planning foresight as well as ongoing flexibility in order to be as efficient and effective as possible," recalls Kevin Cousins, Training Project Manager at Floatdene Green. "On day one, nothing of the shared service centre existed except for a strategy. By project end, nearly 200 staff would have been inducted, trained and would be working in a completely new setting. Although SAP is Premier's strategic application platform, we would still encounter training issues around legacy systems that for one reason or another would need to continue even after the transition period had concluded."



The new shared service centre was intended to process all of the essential, day-to-day financial payments; payroll, accounts receivable, accounts payable etc for Premier Foods, while also supporting the decision making needs of the overall business through extensive financial reporting.

"The challenge was not simply to train 200 new highly skilled staff in new roles," said Cousins. "We were being asked to consider a wide range of user roles - from basic invoice scanning, to complex financial reporting and analysis, and following particular processes specific to a business unit often based upon legacy systems for which no training material existed. We spent a lot of time speaking to people within the company in order to amass the data required to construct documentation and training packages for a truly unique environment."

The training was delivered via a Blended Learning Approach - encompassing various training styles and formats appropriate to the individual or workgroup - and was planned as follows:

- As the majority of the staff for PBS, including departmental heads and other managers, would be new appointments to the business, Floatdene's learning programme needed to incorporate a full company induction process covering standard areas such as health and safety compliance, in addition to the vision and objectives of the new service centre.
- Once new staff had been inducted, they were assigned an individual training curriculum specific to their role or process area. The training courses were designed to incorporate a blend of system demonstrations, interactive simulations and hands-on exercises, principally delivered in classroom style, and supported by online assessment.
- Floatdene then prepared each individual to undergo a shadowing and knowledge transfer engagement without supervision. The preparation involved the development of detailed work instructions covering both IT systems and business process. The engagement concluded with the new staff member visiting the relevant finance organisation to complete the knowledge transfer and process transition to the shared service centre.

**"We chose Floatdene because Premier Foods already had an established relationship with them, and benefited from their SAP training services. This gave us a single point of contact for our training needs." - David Rattigan, Premier Foods**



New appointments had to be made in 'phases'. However, the fluidity of the recruitment effort at an individual level presented difficult and urgent challenges for the trainers. Several appointments within a single function being unable to start on time would suddenly threaten to make the training element extremely complicated. It was therefore important for Floatdene to work closely with the individual department heads who were each recruiting their own teams. This ensured that any changes to the plan were considered immediately within the context of available training facilities and trainers.

"The overall project to establish PBS had a critical path which was very precise, and could not change," commented Rattigan. "Moreover, conducting knowledge transfers from existing personnel experienced on old systems and processes had to be engaged in strict timing with incoming skills requirements. This all went on against the backdrop of a core business need to transition the superseded finance areas out of the company as efficiently as possible. We successfully avoided the prospect of having new people sitting around waiting to be trained, while also preventing ourselves from just duplicating the training resources 200 times for each individual."

**"Whatever got thrown at Floatdene to respond to, they coped with admirably. With their support, not only did we finish the project on time, but the feedback from staff at all levels was extremely positive and the processes we put in place are working just as we'd hoped."**



"The success of the PBS project demanded real partnership between Floatdene and Premier Foods, and we are proud of the contribution we have made to such an ambitious goal," commented Gareth Evans, Operations Director at Floatdene Green. "This is an excellent example of how a well structured, consultative and flexible approach is key when dealing with the specific training challenges posed by a shared service centre implementation."