



case study

robinsons foods

Established over 130 years ago, Robinson's Fresh Foods is one of the largest and best known companies on the Island. The company has over 10 retail outlets; with their own shop in Prospect Terrace, Douglas, plus the fruit and vegetable franchise in the nine Shoprite stores across the Island. The wholesale division is even larger, providing over 80% of the Island's hotels, schools, hospitals, restaurants and catering businesses with fresh and chilled foods, dried goods, groceries and prepared produce. In addition to importing from the UK, Holland, and France, the company also has a strong commitment to sourcing products locally, supporting Manx farmers and producers whenever possible.

Pictured: Janna Horsthuis of Robinson's Foods

manx telecom

Despite this expansion, the firm is still very much a family concern and there are six members of the founding family involved in the company today. Based in Braddan, where it has a large 55,000 sq ft distribution centre, the company also works with two UK depots in North West England.

Demanding

“By its very nature, the food business is very fast moving and demanding,” says John Horsthuis, Managing Director of Robinson’s Fresh Foods. “Being an Island, we have to make special provisions to ensure that we provide the best there is in fresh foods. That can be difficult; freight charges alone mean that if we are to compete with the major UK retailers based on the Island, we need to be both as innovative and efficient as possible. We have to work harder and smarter.”

Robinson’s is one the largest employers on the Island, with over 190 people working across ten sites and the company’s vans (there are twenty of them) are a common sight on Manx roads – distributing to customers throughout the Island. The company has expanded its scope in recent years to include things like online ordering, speciality oriental produce, and fresh fish.

Communications is at the heart of Robinson’s operations and is the responsibility of IT Manager, Mick Juchnowicz.

“With our main warehouse, and the satellite sites across the Island, it’s essential that we have a telecoms system which holds it all together. One of the unusual aspects of our company is that, apart from perhaps the accounts department, most people are highly mobile, and keeping in touch is vital. Our entire communications infrastructure is supplied and managed by Manx Telecom – a decision we made some time ago, and one which brings us lots of benefits,” says Mick.

Unmetered Calls

“One of the best things is that over the years Manx Telecom has become part of our business. They know and understand us and are able to provide us with solutions which suit our particular needs. For example, our highly mobile and scattered workforce meant that we

were, at one time, spending a fortune on mobile phone bills just to keep in touch with each other. We approached Manx Telecom, who suggested that we move to Groups Call Free, which effectively puts all our mobiles on a ‘private network’. This now means that all mobile calls within the company are free. This has saved us a lot of money. A bit later, we were also able to further reduce our costs by adding our landlines into the same package – giving us unmetered calls within the business. A fantastic saving”.

According to Richard Skinner, Account Manager for Robinson’s at Manx Telecom, “Robinson’s is a good example of a company in a very fast moving marketplace which needs an appropriate level of support for its telecoms infrastructure, and I’m glad to say that we have been able to provide just that.”

Integration

These days, telecoms are increasingly integrated into the company’s IT systems, and Manx Telecom provides a fully managed service for all of Robinson’s I.T. and telecoms-related issues. One project involved the setting up a new Virtual Private Network (VPN) linking all the company’s computer systems, a project which encompassed the selection of the equipment and its installation, plus the configuration of routers, firewalls, etc.

More recently Robinson’s Fresh Foods acquired the business, Post-a-Rose, which is now integrated into its floristry division. Post-a-Rose has brought a wealth, of experience in the handling and arranging of fresh flowers to the business. It also shares Robinson’s core values of offering freshness, value and high quality produce, and provides Robinson’s with access to new sales platforms which has the potential to create an exciting new dimension to the company’s operations.

To achieve this amalgamation, all of Robinson’s telecoms systems, and those in place at Post-a-Rose, needed to be seamlessly integrated. This involved complex re-programming of Robinson’s existing telecoms system, as well as changes at Manx Telecom exchange level, and all the work had to be undertaken without disrupting any part of the business.

Relationships

Mick emphasises “Without their historical knowledge of our business and the expertise of the Manx Telecom engineers, this project could have presented massive complications. However, the transition was completed with minor but acceptable snags, as it was always understood that the whole scenario was completely new to all involved. At Robinson’s we are not experts in the telecoms side of things. For us, it’s a huge advantage that Manx Telecom staff know our systems, and know if any new equipment will integrate into our existing systems to provide us with the service we require. Manx Telecom has relationships with Cisco, Mitel and Nortel and is able to assess what’s available, and offer us the most appropriate systems. Over the years, our relationship with Manx Telecom has changed. In the early days – in very crude terms – they provided the landlines and the phones. Today, they are a solutions provider in that they offer many more services and are much more integrated into our business. It’s also important to us that they can support whatever they supply. We need things fast, and if anything goes wrong, we need an immediate solution. We’ve found Manx Telecom’s locally based technical support to be invaluable on very many occasions. Telecoms technology is crucial to our business, and for quality and reliability of service in both the voice and data networks, fixed and mobile, on the Isle of Man, the expertise of Manx Telecom is, in my opinion, unsurpassed.”



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