



## CASE STUDY

# Enabling Growth through IT Improvements

## Sonaspection



**INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE**



**INSTITUTE OF  
CONSULTING**  
PREMIER PRACTICE

## The Client

Sonaspection is a small company manufacturing unusual products – it makes metal welded specimens containing a range of carefully inserted flaws most of which are invisible to the naked eye. Finished specimens are used by customers to support the training and certification of welders and Non Destructive Testing technicians operating within sectors such as oil and gas and the nuclear industry. Specimen size ranges from 30cm and a few kilogrammes up to 10m<sup>2</sup> and many tonnes. Sonaspection has manufacturing operations in both the UK and US but sells its products and expertise worldwide. The company was acquired by the IMechE (Institution for Mechanical Engineers) in 2013. The Consultancy Company was chosen to help Sonaspection on the basis of previous successful delivery of practical training solutions for the Institution.

## The Challenge

Sonaspection is growing rapidly at about 20% a year, employing 25 people with a large bank of knowledge and experience resting with a few senior people. Their existing sales and manufacturing operations were driven by the use of spreadsheets whilst finance was taken care of by Sage Line 50 in the UK and QuickBooks in USA. There was much data duplication within multiple spreadsheets, and the business was dependent on a number of key individuals who were often travelling globally and struggling to collaborate. This reliance on a few individuals and limited support for collaboration was restricting growth, and becoming part of the IMechE added to the range of management information requiring regular collection and collation.

The challenge was to find an IT solution in order to release key management time to concentrate on business growth and reduce reliance on key directors. In addition it was important to use as little of the Sonaspection team's time as possible whilst retaining buy-in and commitment to the related transformation.

## Our Approach

### Phase 1

To understand the business quickly we started by meeting with the team to talk through the project and understand their vision.

We then undertook a complete mapping exercise of all their processes from quotation, procurement enquiries, order intake, shop floor scheduling and direct labour cost recording right the way through to invoicing and despatch. We achieved this by sitting alongside the Sonaspection team while they worked, observing and asking questions which enabled us to learn the business at a detailed level. This approach minimised the time required from the Sonaspection team.

*"The Consultant really solidly understood the business quickly."*

Mark Dowell,  
Managing Director  
IMechE Engineering Training  
Solutions & Sonaspection



We validated our information to check that we had fully understood and trapped all the current issues and processes as well as clearly demonstrating what post transformation business operation would look like.

One small part of the work was to fully understand the management information required by IMechE in London who had a specific interest in WIP Valuation and ease of access to management data.

This knowledge allowed us to create a detailed requirement specification for a new IT system against which we carried out initial market testing. Over ten systems were initially “tested” from which a short-list of three were selected for detailed evaluation in Phase 2.

Phase 1 was concluded with a workshop to

- Consolidate all the findings
- Agree the short-listed IT solutions
- Detail short-term changes in working practices which could be implemented immediately
- Clarify aspects of essential and desirable requirements in the specification
- Detail the savings in time and accuracy that could occur

Undertaking this in a workshop format enabled our recommendations to be interactively challenged and tested by the team and ensured complete buy in to all the work undertaken to that point.

## Phase 2

Within Phase 2 the three shortlisted vendor’s products were analysed in much greater detail and we worked with suppliers to find the best fit between their software and Sonaspection’s working practices. It had been decided at an early stage that software should at most be configured and not customised using bespoke coding to avoid incurring additional costs when newer versions of the software are implemented in the future.

This phase needed the structure and rigor of a project governance process which was set up and agreed. It was necessary to ensure that critical decisions were documented and an appropriate change control process adopted. This approach was also used in the implementation stage.

One interesting aspect that required an innovative solution was how the system would handle Sonaspection’s “standard” product range where the number of variants could be measured by the 1000’s requiring a high level of resource to maintain. This was overcome by the creative use of a configurator plug-in.

*“The team were incredibly flexible in the way they worked to fit in with our changing circumstances.”*

Mark Dowell,  
Managing Director  
IMechE Engineering Training Solutions &  
Sonaspection



## The Solution

We created a robust business case that highlighted the tangible and intangible benefits which included:

- Increased output with the same workforce to grow the business by 50%
- Increased visibility of business operations both within Sonaspection and IMechE, increasing management control and confidence.
- Improved operational and financial reporting accuracy and agility.
- Reduced dependency on key individuals as knowledge and processes are embedded within the system.
- The release of senior management time to generate additional business.
- Mobility and the ability for management to complete key activities whilst travelling globally.
- The ability to support business growth using existing resources.
- Increased business generated through faster response to enquiries and increased “On Time in Full” delivery performance.
- Ability to track cost and time performance against target and drive further benefit realisation through process improvement.
- Future UK/US system integration.
- Savings delivered through improved supplier management.

## The Benefits

- Access to special manufacturing systems knowledge and implementation experience
- Access to experienced practical and realistic transformation support
- Allowed the Sonaspection team to focus on their “day jobs” and continue to grow the business.
- Upfront awareness of how much of Sonaspection time was needed for the project
- Knowledge that the work was detailed yet very practical
- A flexible resource that worked in harmony with the constraints of the business and the staff



## The Future

Sonaspection have now commenced Phase 3 implementation with the assistance of The Consultancy Company. This is focussed on the UK operation however the system will subsequently be rolled out in USA. This will support further business growth and the development of new products and services.

Sonaspection have already recommended The Consultancy Company to another business.

**If you would like to discuss how we may be able to help with current challenges and opportunities in your business please contact:**

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