

Case Study: Warehousing



Accolade Wines

Accolade Wines introduce flexible working patterns

Overview

Accolade Wines, one of the largest drinks companies in Europe, is the European operating arm of Accolade Brands Inc. The company built the largest bonded warehouse in Europe, supplied by a world class dedicated bottling facility, named Accolade Park, Bristol.

Accolade Park was designed to provide the company with the flexibility and capacity to cope with the continued growth of the business in the UK and Europe. This new site presented opportunities for synergy between the warehousing and bottling functions, allowing for increased levels of multi-skilling and flexible working between the teams. It also gave the business an opportunity to review its shift working systems to ensure it was as efficient and cost effective to run.

This resulted in Accolade implementing a new shift patten with fully rostered holidays and an allowance of reserve hours to use during seasonal peaks in production.

Key challenges

- Create a modern effective and efficient rostering system
- Implement more flexible, seasonal based rotas
- Reduce reliance on overtime and seasonal workers
- Create a multi-skilled and disciplinary workforce

Key outcomes

- Ability to meet seasonal changes in demand without overtime or temporary staff
- Better work-life balance for staff
- Consistent high quality products through use of permanent staff only
- Reduction in administration of employee pay
- Enabled training investment
- Developed team work within warehousing and bottling

Key learnings

- Involve all affected parties from the beginning of the process
- Bring in expert advice and software
- Commit to regular reviews & continuous improvements of the system
- Be prepared for unexpected benefits and challenges

Background

Accolade Wines has more than 250 brands in approximately 150 countries with core markets in North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. The business employs 9,500 people, within 60 production/distribution facilities, including 30,000 acres of land and vineyard worldwide. It produces and markets over 120 million cases of wine annually, with a turnover of \$5.2 billion p.a, making them the No 1 Wine Company in the world.

Getting it right from the start

Accolade engaged Working Time Solutions Ltd, and utilised the WORK Suite Scheduling module to gain specialist support in the design of working time arrangements for the new distribution centre and bottling facility. It was clear that more flexible, seasonal based rotas would provide better capacity and reduced costs compared to the relatively inflexible and more traditional working arrangements employed at the existing, separate sites.

Previously the business operated on the classic Double Day Shift, which presented them with a number of issues in relation to the known business growth and available capacity at the new site. The fixed output capacity the shift pattern provided meant that peak production, September through to November, were accommodated with employment of temporary staff, which in turn meant additional wage and training expense. It also created disruption to existing teams with the influx of new, less experienced staff.

A further issue relying on temporary labour during peak months was that there was no guarantee of labour when required. Equally, the reduced production requirement through December to February incurred costs for the under-utilisation of staff.

Flexible multi-disciplined workforce

The desired outcome in the development of new working time arrangements was to create multi-disciplined teams, allowing the company to invest in, and develop, the workforce with flexible and dynamic working patterns which met market demands. This was achieved through the combined work of Accolade senior management, Working Time Solutions Ltd consultancy and the right software which collectively found that the changes in patterns brought about additional benefits. For instance, by changing the terms and conditions the business was able to attract higher calibre personnel.

The approach that followed involved Working Time Solutions Ltd analysis of historical demand data, to provisionally map the supply of labour to the required demand. Both the Unions and the workforce were engaged in the project from an early stage to help generate options and create ownership for the new patterns.



Constant and regular communications, using a variety of methods, including question and answer sessions ensured the workforce were fully and accurately informed. This communication and engagement helped ensure that the significant change met less resistance and prevented a knowledge vacuum, which could be filled with incorrect assumptions.

The outcome

The new shift patterns created better matched the true seasonality of the demand, with additional reserve to ensure this could be accommodated with the existing workforce, rather than by using extensive temporary or agency labour. The shift pattern, with fully rostered holidays provided the company with 140 reserved hours, which is vital for the September to November peak. This also ensured there was no planned weekend work, and provided employees with 14 full weeks off work per annum.

The benefits of the new system included:

- Ability to meet seasonal changes in demand without overtime or temporary staff
- Reduction in staff costs
- Better work-life balance for staff
- Consistently better quality of product through use of permanent staff only
- Fixed labour costs
- Reduction in administration of employee pay
- Enabled training investment
- Developed team work within warehousing and bottling
- Underpinned Lean Culture development
- Allowed for continuous running, improved efficiency and reduced downtime
- Reserve hours and increased rest time – great motivational tools

Onwards and upwards

In addition to the new working patterns created, the WORK Suite® Scheduling module, with the on-going support from Working Time Solutions Ltd, allows Accolade to continue to improve and refine the processes to meet changes to demand in the future. The system provides Accolade with the flexibility to move from a three team structure to a four team structure with minimal impact to employees, if and when required.

In 2010, Accolade Park increased its utilisation of Working Time Solutions Ltd, WORK Suite® package, by going live with WORK Suite® Management Module across the whole manufacturing base. This new addition allowed Accolade to:

- Monitor hours worked and hours owed (reserve) for 150 employees
- Ensure exceptions to plan were checked for working time compliance, and highlighted when not
- Track employees within 30 teams across eight business areas
- Utilise sub teams effectively for start-up of machinery on Sundays
- Report accurately and in real time on a variety of bespoke rota exceptions
- Allow supervisors to view and amend plans, with minimal administration time
- Easily apply and track shift swaps between employees when required
- Assist in the process for ramping up to five shift, or down to three shift once in four shift production