



WHY DIGITAL SYSTEMS GIVE **HOUSE OF BLINDS** A CLEAR ADVANTAGE

James Ryan started out in the window blind business by training up with someone who had fitted blinds for years. It was a great way to learn about making and fitting blinds. It wasn't a great way to learn about digital business processes.

He set up House of Blinds in 2016. The Limerick based business employs three people and makes up blinds in its workshop in Murroe, using raw materials imported from the UK.

In 2020 he got in touch with his Local Enterprise Office for the first time. "I had heard about them on the radio and knew they had supports available to small businesses, so I thought I'd talk to them to see if they could help me. I wanted to grow the business but hadn't the money to do it," he explains.

MORE PRODUCTIVE

To help him make his business more productive, staff at Local Enterprise Office Limerick put him in touch with a digital mentor. Together they looked at how Ryan was running his business, to find ways to make it more efficient.

Sales enquiries typically come either by phone or social media. An appointment is then made for Ryan to visit a house and measure up windows in need of new blinds.

"When I started out in this business I would go out to a house with my notepad. I'd take the window measurements down with pen and paper. I would then go outside, with my supplier price list, and sit in the car to do my calculations. Once I had those done I'd come back in and tell the client," he says.

"I just never felt comfortable doing the calculations in front of the client."

But his clients are busy people and not always well disposed to delay. "I'd often be calling to see them in the evening after work, or during the day they might have to do a school run, so it wasn't good to take too much time doing the calculations," he explains.

In some cases, if a job was particularly complex, he would go back to the office to do the calculations, which meant it could be the following day before the customer got the price.

This delay often resulted in us losing the job as the client may have received a price from a competitor before we submitted our quotation," he says.



MORE EFFICIENT

When his digital mentor heard how House of Blinds' sales process worked, his response was immediate: "He said we could speed that up an awful lot," says Ryan.

His LEO digital mentor developed a simple but effective app for the business which contains all the information from his supplier price lists, easily accessed via his mobile phone. "Now when I go out to do a quote, I simply put in the measurements and the app calculates the cost of the material, the margin, and the customer's price for me, on the spot," he explains.

Having done the calculations, the system stores the quote in the cloud in a file that Ryan can amend if the customer subsequently changes their order, as often happens. His digital mentor also added an integrated ordering system in which confirmed orders are automatically added to the production schedule.

"It's all saved in the cloud now so I can go back to it as much as I want. Previously I could be working off a number of notebooks and could easily lose information," he recalls.

TIME TO GROW

Not alone do the improvements help him run his business more smoothly, but it relieves him of a cumbersome part of the business that he didn't like – working out quotes. That has freed him up to spend more time growing the business.

"Where previously I'd typically have only managed to do five or six appointments in a day, simply because of the time it took to do the calculations, now I can fit in eight or nine," he points out.

The benefits to the business have been enormous.

"We have been able to achieve a 50% increase in the number of calls we can do per day and, by getting to customers quicker and turning around quotes before we leave the



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house, we have improved our enquiry to order conversion rate," he explains.

That has allowed him to invest in a new retail showroom, which will help drive further growth.

"All in all the app makes me look like a much more efficient person which is important because I know my competitors are still doing what I used to do with the notebook," he says.

The experience has whetted his appetite for more digitisation.

"I'm only at the earliest stages of this but already there are loads of things I want to do, ways I can already see to improve the business through the use of digital technology," he says. "I just need to sit back down with my digital mentor and talk about it."



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