

# Schools caterers save £'000s with Saffron System

School meals providers using the new Saffron system from Fretwell-Downing Hospitality are reporting £'000s-worth of saving - and this is only the beginning.



ABOVE: DEVON COUNTY COUNCIL WENT LIVE WITH THE SAFFRON SYSTEM IN APRIL 03. ABOVE CENTRE: GRAHAM ROSSITER AND COLLEAGUES FROM METRO SERVICES, THE WIRRAL. ABOVE RIGHT: BY IMPLEMENTING THE SAFFRON SYSTEM, MANY LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE ALREADY SEEING HUGE IMPROVEMENTS.

Charles Mobbs, director of Fretwell-Downing Hospitality explains: "Each installation is different and the beauty of Saffron is that it can be tailored to individual needs. From the IT team's perspective, it can control all the business processes and interface with other systems, including finance, HR and e-commerce. At the user level, it can be set up to produce reports at the touch of a button."

The Saffron system is ideal for multi-site operations, where central office gathers information from the units and turns it into essential management reports. Streamlined central processes speed up data input - and therefore report output - and free up staff for other tasks, away from the computer.

"Saffron can grow with the client's investment in IT. If it is still a paper-based system at unit level, forms can be filled in manually and the numbers processed at head office. As local authorities install PCs in their units, we can introduce a web-based version of Saffron, so restaurant managers input their data direct."

Several local authorities have already discovered the advantages of the specially developed school meals version, including quality of data, performance, flexibility, time and cost-saving, and they are delighted with the results. These are just three examples.

## METRO - MAXIMISING SUPPLIER DISCOUNTS

Graham Rossiter is head of catering and cleaning for Metro Services, with its 120 primary and secondary schools within the Wirral area. The local authority upgraded to Saffron in May and is already experiencing the benefits.

He says: "We were one of the first authorities to apply an IT system to school meals some 12 years ago. At that time, competitive tendering was coming in and many authorities had never been in a contract situation before. After successfully bidding in open competition to run the school meals and cleaning services, it was essential to keep a tight control on our operating costs and this was when our long relationship with Fretwell-Downing Hospitality began.

The decision to stay with Fretwell-Downing Hospitality was easy. "It's all about speed. Saffron helps us process invoices faster, because there is far less keying in involved. We process high volumes of invoices weekly and can pay suppliers speedily and benefit from greater price discounts. It has saved us money and this is one of the many reasons why we upgraded the system.

"Another useful feature of the system is that we used to cost standard recipes manually, but we can now do it automatically with Saffron. The system carries all the recipes, invoice and stock information, which it cross-references to provide automatic updates when markets fluctuate. It used to take a member of my team at least a couple of days a month to work through all the recipes, now it happens at the touch of a button."

Metro Services has devised a new style of school meals service in its primary schools, which is designed to encourage healthier eating styles amongst the young, improve current pupil uptake of free school meal entitlement and for the first time, offer parents who usually provide their child with a packed lunch the opportunity to purchase one. With the added business that is anticipated, Graham and his team are glad to have Saffron up and running ahead of the new school year in September.

## DEVON - FLEXIBILITY IS VITAL

Devon County Council looked at more than 40 IT providers before appointing Fretwell-Downing Hospitality as its strategic partner, to develop a flexible piece of software that could cope with the complexities of the authority's catering services.

The Direct Service Organisation not only works for Devon County Council, but also operates contracts on behalf of other authorities in the region, making it a £17million turnover business, employing 2400 people.

Finance manager Nigel Child explains: "We had a 13-year-old system which had been developed in-house and was based on a mainframe.

"We organised focus groups involving restaurant contract managers and kitchen staff as well as the head office team, to define what we wanted from a system. One of the main points we were looking for was greater flexibility. We wanted to be able to manipulate the information to give us the reports we would find useful. Next on the list was improved communication. The existing system told us what was happening in our business, but it didn't enable us to send information direct to our customers. Also, we wanted to use less paper in line with e-government proposals."

The Saffron system went live on 1st April, 2003. "Our biggest benefit has been tighter management control, resulting in savings against food, labour and sundry costs. The average primary school area manager, for example, has 120 units under

their control, over a wide geographic area. Saffron enables them to keep their finger on the pulse."

Area managers have adapted well to the system. "Some are happy to use Saffron as it stands, others want to push the boundaries a little bit further, but the system is flexible, so they can create their own style of reporting. For example, they can isolate a group of units and manipulate the data to find out how they are performing as a standalone business."

## DARLINGTON - 3% ON THE BOTTOM LINE

The move to Saffron was a natural progression for Darlington Borough Council's Leisure and Arts Division. They had been using Fretwell-Downing Hospitality's proVISION for Windows product since 1998, but were looking for an upgrade. The Division's responsibilities had grown to include civic catering in situations as diverse as golf clubs, theatres and art centres, as well as 35 school meals operations, together accounting for turnover in excess of £2.5million.

Cost saving was the main reason for the switch. Assistant Director of the Leisure and Arts Division Steve Thompson explains: "We purchase in excess of £1million-worth of food every year and we need vigorously to monitor prices over a vast range of products. By upgrading to Saffron, we were able to improve our procurement procedures; introduce tighter controls over the products being purchased, and develop audit trails to track the volumes going through our business."

Tighter controls have had a significant impact on the bottom line. "A large number of units are committed to buying from our standard list and for the most part, it works well. However, we now use individual product line codes and the Saffron system flags up where a unit is buying off list. We have the chance to rectify the situation and this has been reflected in the gross profit margins. Overall, we have improved our GP by 3% since Saffron came on stream."

The team aims to give individual unit managers access to data and is rolling out PCs to the units, beginning with the civic sites. "This will mean managers can access prices for costing purposes whenever they need them and because we will all be working from the same database, the food costs throughout the estate should clearly reflect current market prices."

Steve is very pleased with Saffron and the company that supplied it. "One of Fretwell-Downing Hospitality's great strengths as a company is that it has turned our comments into real development," he says.



saffron

## You want more..?

...you can, by implementing the Saffron system from Fretwell-Downing Hospitality. Many local authorities are already seeing huge improvements.

Saffron is a web enabled software system which can be implemented to suit your local catering contract, and to meet your management style and requirements. So, whether you focus on simple data across hundreds of sites, or complex operational routines on a few large contract sites, Saffron can meet those challenges!

Purchasing, stock management, recipe and menu modelling, weekly returns, cash summaries, management reports....all form parts of the Saffron solution. And everything is implemented, trained and supported by Fretwell-Downing Hospitality, the specialist supplier for local authorities.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT US AT  
Brincliffe House, 861 Ecclesall Road, Sheffield S11 7AE

telephone: +44 (0)114 281 6060 facsimile: +44 (0)114 281 6061  
e-mail: sales@fdhospitality.com www.fdhospitality.com



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