



## View from the top

Software overhaul helps juice maker Innocent cope with effect of rapid expansion, says Lisa Kelly

# Electronic data backs Innocent's thirst for growth

THEY do things differently at Innocent, the fastest-growing drinks firm in the UK, and that includes how systems magician Andrea Kalavsky approaches her uniquely-titled role.

At Fruit Towers, located in Shepherd's Bush, London, Kalavsky and her team walk on grass instead of carpets, sit on beanbags to discuss the company's IT strategy and name their seven servers after fruit.

Since Kalavsky started two years ago, the firm has doubled in size and opened offices in Europe. And IT operations have to grow quickly to support the company.

'I am dealing with 109 expectations on a daily basis,' she says.

'It is tough from a systems point of view and I can't be a jack of all trades and a master of none, so I hire the expertise.'

One of the first recruits was an in-house developer.

As a first step, Innocent implemented Microsoft's Great Plains financial software.

'It offers a skeleton of a finance package, allowing a developer to add what we want,' says Kalavsky.

And what Innocent wants is less paper and a lot more electronic transactions.

So the company created a module for e-invoicing.

'We had a man that walked around with pieces of paper wanting people to sign-off different amounts,' says Kalavsky.

'We decided that we'd had enough of paper as we are trying to build a sustainable business.'

Having electronic copies means invoices can be signed off by logging onto the approval module. 'We want to e-finance everything,' says Kalavsky.

As its name suggests, Innocent aims to be ethical and open. And it encourages

customers to contact the company by advertised email addresses often found at the bottom of drinks bottles.

Unsurprisingly, email volumes skyrocketed, along with spam.

So Innocent switched from its buckling in-house Exchange server to a hosted email service from Cobweb Solutions, chosen for its scalability, and spam and virus protection.

Now Kalavsky is looking to sustain an increasing thirst for data sharing and is weighing up whether to use Cobweb's online collaboration service or a virtual private network (VPN).

'We are getting to the size where data collaboration is important,' she says.

'Before, just the sales guys needed to log in to check mail. Now we have operational teams abroad who want to work with our team here, but we are not yet big enough to need a VPN.'

## A web site for taking orders and feeding them into Innocent's system could make non-EDI partners compatible

Mobile workers use Windows Remote Desktop to connect to Innocent's server, Cherry, a Microsoft terminal server. But Kalavsky highlights its limitations.

'If someone opens an email at home, and they're sent a link to a document, they cannot open it. Or if an employee is visiting a client who has Remote Desktop disabled on their computer, they have no access,' she says.

'If we decide to deploy a VPN, the first

step would be to increase our network capacity, perhaps up to 10 Mb/s.'

New technology is also helping the operations department, which uses an electronic data interchange (EDI) system for dealing with large supermarkets and big wholesalers directly.

Recently, a project was undertaken to introduce the AS2

specification for exchanging EDI files securely over the internet with Asda.

The supermarket chain favours AS2, which uses HTTP to send data, reduces traffic costs and increases the accuracy of supply chain data.

'We needed to open up a port via our firewall for data exchange with Asda, which is the first company we have done it with,' says Kalavsky.

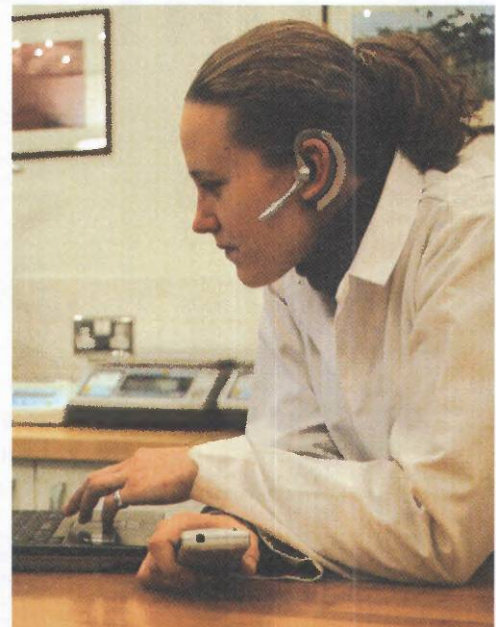
But Innocent also has plans to enhance its supply chain with smaller customers that cannot afford an EDI system.

It is looking at making non-EDI partners EDI-compatible by creating a web site for taking orders that can then be fed into Innocent's system.

Kalavsky says it is extremely important that all of Innocent's orders are up to the minute and accurate.

The drinks firm works with suppliers around the globe, buying consignments of fruit that arrive at storage depots.

At the production site, barcodes are applied to pallets, which are scanned by operators when they reach the warehouse.



Kalavsky: remote workers suffer email limitations, so innocent must now choose between deploying a VPN or a data collaboration service

Kalavsky's team acknowledge that radio frequency identification (RFID) technology could further improve supply chain efficiency by tracking goods more effectively than barcodes.

'We ship millions of cases of drinks and one of the biggest problems is the manual element. Having to check every single item means it's easy to make a mistake,' says Mike Stevens, operations manager at Innocent.

But they also believe now is not the right time to introduce RFID.

'RFID in principle eliminates the manual element, but it's hugely expensive and not many people in retail have the technology to translate the information stored in the chips,' says Stevens.

Translating sales information is a key project at Innocent, which buys electronic point-of-sale data to feed into Peach, the company's Microsoft SQL server for data mining.

To speed up answers to queries against growing data volumes, Kalavsky says Innocent has invested in business intelligence tool Panorama NovaView.

'We spend a lot of money on data and the last thing we want is to be out of synch with what's happening out there,' she says.

Marlow Truman, supply chain specialist at consultant Deloitte, agrees that knowing what is going on in the market is the key to success.

'Retailers have vast amounts of data and a richness of information. Those that can sift and pull out the important data, glean intelligence from it and respond to it the quickest will succeed,' he says.

Further reading  
[www.computing.co.uk/2126717](http://www.computing.co.uk/2126717)



## Core business processes

'THERE are three main processes to ensuring IT success: back-up from people and systems, communication and security,' says Andrea Kalavsky, systems magician at Innocent.

She says the IT team at the drinks company are not only well-qualified, but also love what they do.

With a company-wide can-do ethos, many IT projects get the go-ahead: but Innocent does not risk slipping on banana skins.

'Whatever we are thinking of doing, we must have the ability to bring back what we had if it all goes wrong,' says Kalavsky.

And documentation of changes is strongly instilled.

'You must write down how you do what you do when you sit behind a computer,' says Kalavsky.

Offsite back-ups are made on an hourly, daily, weekly and monthly basis of drinks and documents orders.

Similarly, each department backs up its core processes.

Preparing for worst-case scenarios – such as the building burning down – has caused Kalavsky to ponder: 'Am I being too over-the-top?'

But security and business continuity concerns and procedures do not constitute paranoia.

'We don't have an internet policy,' says Kalavsky. 'I explain to people that if you download music, you may download a virus and lose your work and if that happens I can't help you.'

Responsibility, therefore, rests with workers and trust is rewarded. The virtuous circle stems from good communication.