

Chief Moves Up a Gear With Cincom Inquiry to Order Solution

Q&A With Chief

Goal:

- Automate the inquiry-to-order process
- Simplify Chief's product marketing
- Reduce the number of configuration errors by simplifying the management of hundreds of thousands of possible combinations
- Significantly reduce the time it takes to prepare proposals

Challenge:

- Include all of the research department's requirements – technical, geographical and legal
- Produce rapid solutions and an official pricing structure
- Enable the sales staff to focus more on genuine value-added and customer-oriented activities
- Rapidly update and maintain critical modifications to the product range

Solution:

Cincom Inquiry to Order: Cincom Interactive Selling and Product Configuration

Key Results:

- Quotation time reduced by 50%
- €250,000 saved per year thanks to a 50% reduction in order-entry errors
- Seven workdays saved every time a product line changes
- Time spent on monthly updates reduced from six days to four, which equals one month's worth of work-days per year



Situation:

Established in 1991, Chief quickly became the leading French supplier of cold-storage units thanks to its high-quality services. Amalgamated with the Linde Group in 1998, Chief caters to the domestic and foreign requirements of all the leading French retail groups (Carrefour, Leclerc, Auchan, Intermarché, etc). Since July 2004, Chief has been a subsidiary of Carrier, a member of the UTC Group (United Technologies Corporation), which also includes Linde Froide. The company has revenues of €40 million and distributes products from its three production sites. Given the complexity of Chief's operations and the specific nature of its customers' requirements, Chief decided to deploy an interactive selling and product configuration solution – Socrates®.

Philippe Salengros, Marketing Director; Didier Poveda, IT Manager and Alexis Amblard, Management Controller explain how Cincom helps them to manage quotations on a daily basis while improving in-house profitability.

What made you feel that quotation management needed to be improved?

Philippe Salengros: “Cold-storage units are manufactured to order to cater to the specific needs of retail stores. Each retail chain has its own unique requirements (for meat, dairy products, etc.) in terms of the type of refrigeration or ventilation, lighting, and choice of color. Then, of course, you need to take into consideration size constraints and where they will be located within the store. These kinds of details change for every store. And, the choice of certain elements, such as a regulator for example, will depend on the type of cold air required. We have six product ranges, each comprised of several thousand references. So, there are several hundreds of thousands of possible combinations for each cold-storage unit. That’s why we can’t standardize production. You can easily see how only a solution like Cincom Inquiry to Order can manage all the rules and generate quotations quickly, enabling us to remain competitive in a highly competitive market.”

What advantages does Cincom Inquiry to Order provide?

Alexis Amblard: “Given the wide range of our available product options, the advantage of using this tool is immediately obvious. It lets us select features – the right features – with unbeatable accuracy, and it provides accurate quotations with precisely calculated margins. Thanks to its flexibility, there’s transparent communication between the order-processing system at the factory and the graphic representation system that enables us to view the end product.”



Didier Poveda: “With the Cincom solution, it’s easy to update data. The programming is very simple, and that’s important when there are often new references to create. For example, it only takes 30 seconds to create a new field with the Cincom Solution. It’s great. What’s more, the scroll-down menus are so user-friendly that there’s no need for specific training.”

Philippe Salengros: “For us, it’s essential to maintain and improve our quality of service, because it’s due to our customer service that we can increase our market share. We know that we stand out from our competitors because of the quality of service we provide. The speed of our delivery is unbeatable. We can deliver within five weeks when our closest competitors take eight. That’s a huge competitive advantage, and one to which Cincom Inquiry to Order contributes.”

What tangible benefits have you already gained from using Cincom Inquiry to Order?

Alexis Amblard: “You must understand that, for Chief, the calculations are always complicated. Thanks to Cincom Inquiry to Order, we can make our figures clearer and more precise. As a result, we’ve cut our losses due to quotation errors by 50% – losses we had to make up by working late nights or supplying parts free of charge. Thanks to the configurator, we were able to put a figure on these losses and cut them by half. Reducing these errors results in a savings of around €250,000 per year, after amortization of the configurator.”

Philippe Salengros: “We’ve cut quotation time by 50% since using the configurator to generate quotes. Cincom Inquiry to Order has also enabled us to improve our expertise and the training of our sales staff. Before, everyone had a product range they were comfortable with and so they tended not to be creative with their proposals. The Cincom solution has allowed all of our sales team to give a better response to customer needs in terms of turnaround time and in satisfying their requirements. And as a result, our turnover has increased.”



Updating the Chief product range is a routine and arduous job. How has Cincom Inquiry to Order made it easier?

Didier Poveda: “A team of 20 salesmen and sales assistants draw up quotations every day, for French and foreign clients. The product is therefore used both in English and French. Before, we had one knowledge module per product and per language, i.e., a total of 12 modules. Today, the multi-language kit saves us considerable time by deploying a single module per product – a total of six modules – regardless of the number of languages in which we want to quote. Before, when we changed a complete product range, we needed seven working days to re-create the pages in English, not counting the time spent on translations. Now, it takes less than 30 seconds to load the vocabulary.

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– Alexis Amblard
Chief Management Controller

Our products change constantly. In addition to complete product changes – that are rare – we update the range on a monthly basis. This used to take us six days – four for programming and two to put the English version online. Now, it only takes four days. The remaining two days can be put to more profitable and worthwhile uses. And another point is that lack of resources meant the English version was only put online three weeks after the French version. As a result, the sales team did not have the same information in English as in

French. Now, with all the languages updated simultaneously, everyone has access to the same information in real time. This means fewer errors and less of an impact on our bottom line.”

Are there other areas where you think Cincom Inquiry to Order can help you make improvements?

Philippe Salengros: “For us, the ideal future scenario would be to put our configurator on an extranet so that any customer who wanted to could design their own units online. This would eliminate any problems of comprehension between buyer and seller and would do away with a source of errors and misquotations. It would speed up our processes and reduce delivery times even further. The customer would receive better service, faster. And, the sales team would also have more time to devote to relationship-building and added-value activities. This would naturally make our sales staff more productive and generate greater revenues. Not forgetting, of course, that this would also alleviate the heavy workload of our after-sales service.”



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