

# Rebooted and repurposed

Despite much of UK manufacturing either drastically reducing or stopping altogether during the lockdown, software developer 123 Insight reports that many of its manufacturing management software customers looked at ways to diversify their product range as well as making their shopfloor facilities ready for the 'new normal' of social distancing.

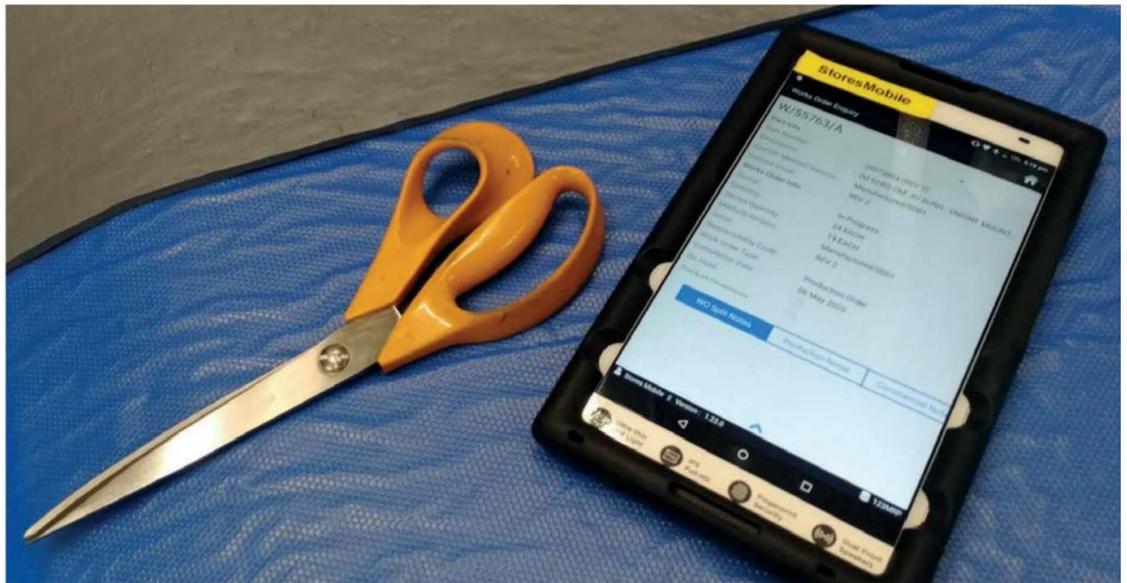
**W**hen the lockdown and subsequent furlough scheme were announced by the UK Government in March 2020, many companies lost a large percentage of their workforce – and knowledge – overnight.

123insight users benefited from many processes following a common pattern and user interface, so for example, staff in sales could easily raise or follow up on a purchase order.

123 Insight's subscription business model also allowed companies to make further short-term savings by reducing the number of licences used per month. Simon Badger, 123 Insight's managing director said: "Traditional suppliers were still charging for maintenance, consultancy, support and updates, but 123insight users pay a simple per-licence subscription per month which can be increased or decreased at any time.

"This allowed companies that found themselves rapidly contracting to immediately reduce their licence count to meet their smaller-sized workforce, but still have full functionality and support."

Conversely, in some situations, such



Butser Rubber used 123mobile to remove desktop PCs from the shopfloor

as companies supplying the NHS, 123 Insight saw an increase in licence take-up – in particular 123mobile showed a marked licence number increase. This iOS/Android app allows staff to easily maintain social distancing, using tablet devices to perform stores and shopfloor functions such as checking stock or booking on/off of a job.

## Time for tablets

One company that took advantage of this was Butser Rubber, based in Liss, Hampshire. Although all administration staff were working remotely during lockdown, they still had complete visibility of stock and production through 123insight via VPN.

Furthermore, some PC terminals used for stock control or logging of shopfloor operations were removed and replaced with tablet-based 123mobile licences. Charlie Easton, operations manager explains: "Overall, we actually increased our 123insight

licence count. Staff have been provided with their own tablets, so no-one else touches them and they don't have to be regularly sanitised.

"We've been able to reclaim space on the shopfloor, giving staff more room for social distancing and reducing movement through better use of the space in general. Another benefit is that staff also clock on when they arrive and off when they leave, so we can immediately see who is in the building."

Use of barcodes has also expanded, and with barcode readers now set to 'always scan' staff simply hold the paperwork in front of the reader for contactless logging of processes.

Butser Rubber was involved with the push for ventilator parts, setting up a PC with 123insight and a dedicated email account installed near its rapid prototyping equipment. Designs would arrive and immediately be associated with newly-created parts and bills of

materials within 123insight, providing full traceability from CAD file to finished part.

Mr Easton noted: "We were going from receiving drawings through to having finished prototypes in 90 minutes, so the ability to process this rapidly in 123insight whilst still maintaining traceability was extremely useful."

Butser had already taken advantage of the 123bi business analytics tool to deliver reports, dashboards and data export, but relied on it more during the pandemic, as staff could quickly retrieve and analyse data through the a browser.

## New opportunities

Another 123 Insight customer, yacht canopy manufacturer Tecsew anticipated that it would be hit hard by the downturn and immediately looked at where there might be other manufacturing opportunities.

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Thinking about how the company would provide a safer working environment for its own staff, Tecsew came up with the idea of the 'Sneeze Guard' office divider, repurposing some of the materials used within its current product range.

Tecsew could create the new products quickly within its existing 123insight system, and also have the possibility to create 'divisions', allowing it to design alternatively branded paperwork that could be shipped with the goods. Director Ally Bland commented: "We were able to perform all of the administration for this entire new product range and manufacturing process with

the same administration staff."

With the drastic increase in PPE demand and the cry for help from the NHS for ventilators, many manufacturers heeded these calls, quickly reshaping their businesses. Hull-based Advanced Plastics not only produced ventilator parts but also worked in conjunction with Hull University to design and manufacture level 3 CE approved PPE face shields, accredited for use in both the medical and industrial sectors.

Rob Anderson, managing director affirmed: "123insight allowed us to be agile in our approach – we've been using it for so long that we actually take it for granted that we can do that. We had an instant

view of our capacity. We were discussing designs on the Monday and in production by the Saturday. Someone from a much larger company said to me that there is no way that they could have responded in a similar timeframe. It's the fact that 123insight gives us the vision throughout the business that allows us to do that."

123 Insight itself was also able to react and reshape swiftly during the pandemic. Staff continued to work remotely from home and the business remained 100% operational for both customers and prospects.

The company switched from its local Evaluation Workshops, that allow prospects to see the software, to online 123insight

INFO Exchanges – 90 minute web-based sessions that allow attendees to understand the 123insight business model, see the software and ask questions.

Aspects of training have been moved online, using a combination of web-based tools to allow attendees to use the software and see the trainer's screen simultaneously. Simon Badger concluded: "Both our business model and structure are robust in that we are able to respond quickly to significant events such as COVID-19.

"This is the second 'disaster' that we've had to respond to in recent years, after a flood made our offices unusable for several months. On

that occasion we were fully operational again within a matter of hours.

"Although we have seen a slowdown in some areas from both customers and prospects there are those that have taken this opportunity to evaluate how to put their business in the best condition to ride the storm. Our last three online 123insight INFO Exchanges have been well-attended, so it's clear that UK manufacturing is itching to get moving again.

Companies can book to attend the free online 123insight INFO Exchange session at [123insight.com](http://123insight.com).

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