

Al Halwani Brothers controls costs with IFS

Al Halwani Brothers has reined in its costs and streamlined its business processes over its sprawling operation, which includes 13 factories and nine outlets, producing over 400 items from over 1400 materials. To bring greater control to its production and distribution operation, the company embarked on a company wide enterprise resource planning (ERP) project, implementing financials, manufacturing and distribution modules in just 12 months. "We're trying to make ideal use of the company's resources," explained Osama Ahmed, assistant general manager of IT, Al Halwani Bros.

After assessing several packages Al Halwani Bros. went with a solution from IFS, which enabled a quick deployment, following IFS' recommended rapid implementation methodology (RIM). RIM took the company's IT department and other key training people through four steps to ensure a smooth rollout of the technology. "[RIM] depends on the coaching and training of key personnel," said Ahmed. "Then there was the business process review which maps the current business model and systems functionality to the package. Then we identified the areas that could be improved on in the business area and finally there was the implementation."

Despite the use of RIM, Al Halwani Bros. still had its hands full re-engineering the company's business processes. With the introduction of the ERP package, the company had to introduce entirely new methods of handling even basic operations, such as the sales order process and the integration of orders with the Al Halwani's planning and manufacturing processes. "We decided to apply ERP within our organisation, and that meant there was a lot of re-engineering of business processes. We used new techniques in different areas... we needed to increase the amount of information available and links between [customer data] and our planning process," explained Ahmed.

The project also required a lot of changes in the company's financial



SMOOTH BUSINESS PROCESS: The deployment of financial, distribution and manufacturing modules within Al Halwani Bros, has streamlined the companies business processes.

operations. By streamlining the company's accounting system, Al Halwani managed to reorganise the number of customer records from 10,000 to just 400.

"Since consolidating our information, it's now a lot easier to analyse our company's performance. When we study that data we can then identify other areas of the business where we can make improvements," said Ahmed.

With the core IFS implementation going live towards the tail end of 1999, the IT department embarked on planning the next phase of the project, connecting the individual branch outlets with the head office, via the Internet. For the last three months, Al Halwani has been running its ERP applications over the Internet, centralising the information in the company's head office. "All the branches use the system very heavily, but we needed to centralise the infor-

mation," says Ahmed. "Our coming project is now to focus on the analysis of information. We have some tools that are connected to the IFS database, which enables the multi-dimensional [modelling] of data. Through these tools you can put together a decision support system and enable greater analysis of information."

The business critical information is transferred over the Web through a combination of leased and dial up connections, depending on the size and the amount of traffic from each particular outlet.

According to Ahmed, quality of service hasn't really been an issue for the company — at the end of the day the company has still made gains in its efficiency. "This has increased our efficiency a lot, the information is always available and constantly updated for all our members of staff," explained Ahmed.