Ottawa Food Bank

The Ottawa Food Bank

BLUE LINK

In 2012, the Ottawa Food Bank distributed 7,224,741 lbs of food.

The Ottawa Food Bank

Mission: To collect and distribute food to Member Agencies serving people in need in the Ottawa area.

Vision: That no one goes hungry in the Ottawa area.

www.OttawaFoodBank.ca

Situation

The Ottawa Food Bank is the second largest food bank in Canada, dealing with 12 tons of food a day and distributing product to its 140 Member Agencies each week.
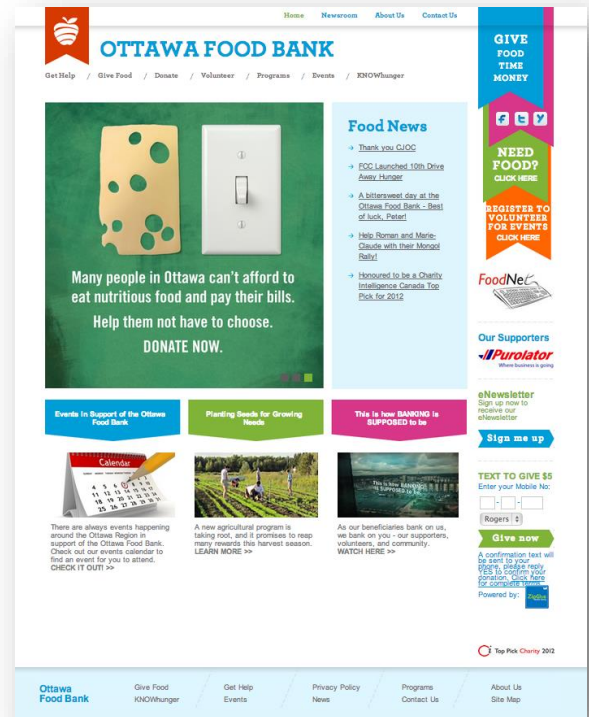
Challenge

As the Ottawa Food Bank continued to grow, managing inventory in the warehouse was become increasingly difficult and as a result inventory levels were not accurate. This caused issues when picking orders and when organizing how much product was available for each Agency. Further adding to the problem, the Ottawa Food Bank had no way of creating reports to present at their monthly stakeholder meetings.

Solution

With the help of Blue Link's inventory and accounting ERP software the Ottawa Food Bank implemented wireless barcode scanning into their warehouse for more efficient inventory management, properly set up codes within the system to distinguish between donated and purchased product, and implemented Blue Link's automated reports for use at board meetings.

Result

The Blue Link implementation as automated all warehouse processes and picking orders is now much more efficient with the use of barcode scanners. Manual processes and the need for pen and paper have been eliminated, and automatic reports are generated on a monthly basis to present to the board.

Situation

The Ottawa Food Bank was founded in 1984 and has since grown to become the second largest food bank in Canada. The Ottawa Food Bank collects and distributes food to Member Agencies which support 140 emergency food programs in the Ottawa area to feed approximately 48,000 people a month – 37% of which are children. Much more than just canned goods, the Ottawa Food Bank is a staple food relief organization for the region of Ottawa distributing both frozen and fresh produce and meat through its numerous programs.

Gary McCarthy, Operations Manager for the Ottawa Food Bank has been with the organization for 17 years and initiated the search for a new system in order to improve the efficiency of their warehouse operations. Along with searching for a new system, Gary spent time researching available funding and was able to secure a grant from the Trillium Foundation to cover the majority of the software costs.

> **Blue Link is working out fantastic. It is something that we should have done years ago."**
>
> - *Gary McCarthy, Operations Manager, Ottawa Food Bank*

Challenge

Prior to Blue Link, the Ottawa Food Bank was using an in-house developed application with minimal functionality and no reporting features. As the Ottawa Food Bank continued to grow, it was becoming more difficult to track inventory and their existing picking and packing method using pen and paper was creating issues. With 140 Member Agencies receiving product each week, the Ottawa Food Bank was struggling to organize which orders to pick first based on delivery dates, and how much product was available for each Agency. Adding to the complexity of this process, certain Member Agencies have restrictions and guarantees on how much product they receive each week, including how much donated vs. purchased product they receive. The old method of dealing with these orders involved pen and paper - an order picker would go around with a list of food items and quantities, picking product and then manually recording the quantities and types of product picked before putting it on the skid.

In addition to struggling with picking orders, the Ottawa Food Bank did not have an efficient process for receiving product. Each day several pallets of product are received in addition to what comes in from donations and programs such as the Red Cage Program. With volunteers sorting these items into boxes, inventory was not accurately being accounted for, resulting in inventory discrepancies and making it more difficult to allocate product when picking orders.

Lastly, the Ottawa Food Bank had no way of creating meaningful reports for presentation at their monthly board meetings. These issues combined prompted Gary to search for a more sophisticated solution. "The need was there. We needed a better reporting system in place – something that would track incoming food – something we were never able to do before Blue Link. We were using Excel spread sheets and could only keep track of what was going out."

With its food industry partnerships and bulk purchasing power, the Ottawa Food Bank turns $1 donated into $5 worth of food into the community.

Solution

For the Ottawa Food Bank, a new solution would need to track inventory properly, distinguish between donated vs. purchased items, create meaningful reports and improve the picking, packing and receiving process. Gary found a solution to each of these requirements with Blue Link. Member Agency information and restrictions were configured within Blue Link's order templates and codes were set up to distinguish donated from purchased items. Using Blue Link's barcode scanning solution, picking and receiving is now automated and the use of pen and paper eliminated. With the scanner, staff are now able to walk up to a shelf in the warehouse and, with the click of a button, get current data on what is in the box on the shelf and of that, what product has been donated vs. purchased. Staff can then pull sales orders - which are prioritized according to delivery dates – to get an itemized list of what needs to be picked for each order. As soon as an item gets picked in the warehouse, it drops off the list and once a full order has been picked, the system automatically triggers the printing of the packing documents and inventory levels get updated in Blue Link.

Gary worked with Blue Link's resident genius - Darren - to get the system set up to accommodate all of the Ottawa Food Bank's needs and as Gary explains, "Every time we need something, Darren or one of your people is there to answer any questions".

> "Before, everything was done with pen and paper...It was a lot of writing. Two to three instances where they had to enter data to get up-to-date data. A click of a button does the same thing in Blue Link – just by scanning a barcode. The data is there and current as of that moment. It has saved a lot of time with data input." - **Gary**

Results

The new system implementation was successful in meeting the Ottawa Food Bank's objectives and according to Gary "Blue Link is working out fantastic, it is something that we should have done years ago." Implementing a modern Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system is not always straightforward – especially for not-for-profit businesses – but working with the Ottawa Food Bank was routine procedure for Blue Link.

Gary continues to see favourable results from the system and when asked what his favourite thing about Blue Link is, Gary answers "Inventory. Knowing exactly what is on the shelf. Secondly, the reporting. The Ottawa Food Bank is run by a volunteer board of directors – we go to monthly meetings to present reports. To be able to produce detailed reports is fantastic." Both Darren and Gary agree that food banks must begin following a more traditional business model, especially when it comes to implementing proper software - "It's a must. You need a system like Blue Link that integrates everything. The financials and inventory - it's the way to go." Although finding the funding for such a project can be difficult for not-for-profits Gary explains that, "the Trillium Foundation is a great opportunity for these projects. [There are] lots of opportunities for grants for these tech projects."

Summary of Ottawa Food Bank implementation:

Detailed reports for stakeholders	Distinguish between purchased and donated product	Handheld scanning solution

Why Blue Link?

"…I started asking around to get recommendations and Blue Link came up. Mark came on-site to evaluate our needs and determined that we would be a good fit. Then Darren came in and went through the requirements in more detail and also determined it was a good fit…Our dealings with Blue Link has been super. It's still relatively new and we're learning, and there are still new things to start using but we want to keep using more aspects of the system and we're getting there. The software is user friendly and provides us with everything we need." - **Gary**

Accounting and Inventory Management Software

Blue Link offers fully integrated accounting and inventory management software, primarily for small-medium wholesalers and distributors. With Blue Link software you will be able to:

✓ **Grow Your Business** with a fully integrated and automated system
✓ **Decrease Costs** with better inventory management
✓ **Save Time and Reduce Errors** with automated processes across all business operations

Accounting Software | Inventory Software | Handheld Scanning Solution | Hosted vs. On-Premise

Want to learn how you can become a success story?

If you're interested improving processes, automating your warehouse and decreasing costs contact us.

Receive a Free Consultation | Receive a Free Demo