Case study:
Invopak

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Invopak, part of the Involvement Group, is a leading rigid packing supplier. They supply a diverse customer base of thousands of manufacturers in the UK and globally with a wide range of products and custom packaging options.

With over 50 years of experience, they are experts in sourcing, stocking and distributing over 4,000 SKUs, including custom packaging options, to global industries.

The challenge

Before implementing EazyStock, Invopak faced significant purchasing challenges in getting the right stock to its distribution centers. Operating a hub-and-spoke model from two main hubs with multiple buildings, Invopak's forecasting methods relied on guesswork and estimations, often leading to stockouts or excess inventory. This lack of accuracy and efficiency in its procurement practices was a significant pain point for the company.

As a distributor, Invopak's customers rely on them to have stock, as Head of Supply Chain Oliver Lancaster explains.

"If we don't have stock of one item, the whole basket will walk to a competitor. Customers only want one invoice and one delivery, so availability is key."

As Invopak was transitioning enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems to Microsoft Dynamics Business Central (BC), Oliver assessed procurement practices and highlighted key areas for development. He identified that BC's demand forecasting functionality wasn't sophisticated enough for their needs, so he started looking for a third-party tool that would help increase availability without costing the earth.

Oliver had clear objectives in addition to improving demand forecasting. He wanted software that would automate order suggestions, provide better stock visibility, provide guidance on buffer stock, facilitate stock transfers, save time, and help them respond to changing lead times.
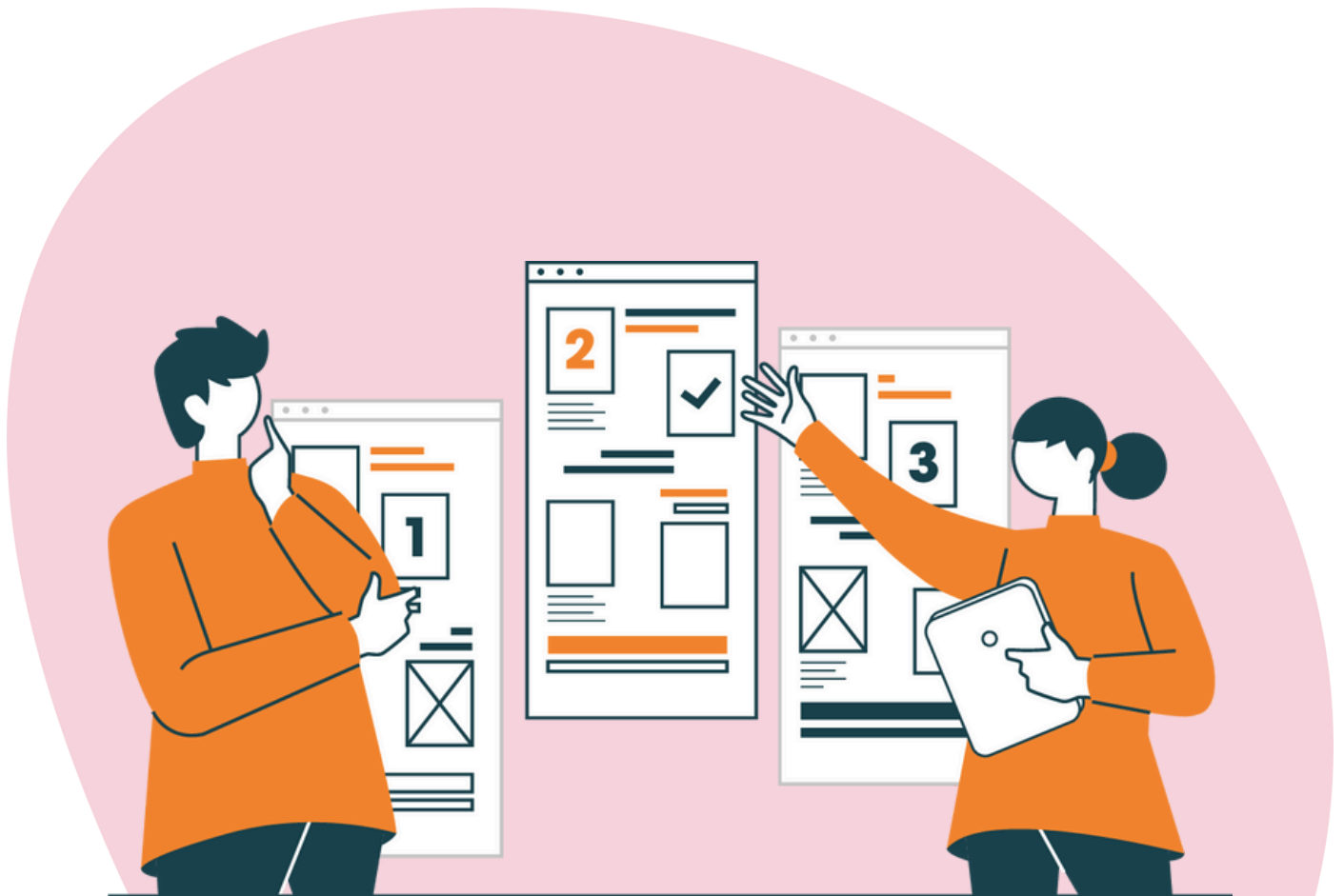
The solution

After evaluating several systems, EazyStock's ready-made BC connector in the Microsoft App Store stood out. This boosted confidence in the system against the significant risk of those needing custom, non-Microsoft-approved connectors.

"EazyStock works with Business Central, full stop. We knew we could work everything else out later."

Oliver and his team had considered another more rigid inventory optimization system, but the company couldn't answer their questions about its functionality. This unresponsiveness and inflexibility at an early stage raised concerns about the potential for a successful working relationship. In contrast, EazyStock's flexibility, responsiveness, prompt support, and straightforward functionality made it the clear choice for Invopak.

On top of the technical aspects, Oliver had a good feeling about EazyStock, and Ryan Cole's pitch alongside Ranveer Singh's technical knowledge was a confidence-boosting, winning combination. *"I felt like EazyStock really wanted to work with us. They pitched better, and EazyStock made the decision...easy. It just seemed like these guys would make my life easier."*

"I'd never used a system like this, and since I've started using it, this feels like how easy it should be. The old system was just unnecessarily hard work. It's only now using a system like EazyStock that you're like, 'wow, this is what it actually should be like working in procurement.'"

Claire Rolfe
Procurement Officer

The results

Invopak's impressive results mean the team cannot speak highly enough about EazyStock's impact.

EazyStock has significantly improved inventory planning, reduced stockouts and excess inventory, and increased customer satisfaction. These improvements have streamlined operations, leading to increased efficiency and cost savings.

Here's how these results align with Oliver's key objectives:

Guided buffer stock

EazyStock has proven instrumental in providing near real-time data and insights that enable the team to maintain optimal buffer stock levels. This guidance has been invaluable in improving their inventory planning and ensuring they can meet customer demands despite fluctuating lead times.

Improved visibility

Invopak now has clear visibility over its stock and ordering. EazyStock's capabilities allow for accurate forecasting and ordering, increasing availability and confidence in their inventory management and ordering processes. According to Oliver, *"Accurate forecasting and stock visibility have been vital for us as a tinplate manufacturer, helping us to optimize our production runs so that we can produce the right packaging at the right time for our customers."*

Elise Wilkes, Claire Rolfe, and the team's ability to identify trends and demand changes helps the sales team to check and adjust customer forecasts proactively.

"It might turn out that they've won a new customer or added a night shift, which allows us to up our forecast and ensure we don't hit a stockout."

Increased availability

97% availability on A lines, hitting 100% availability during certain periods

Invopak didn't report on availability before using EazyStock, and building reports was challenging. Oliver initially used EazyStock's eGuide on ABC analysis to classify their items based on their value and importance. He built what he terms *"probably the greatest spreadsheet I've ever built in my life, which was effectively trying to be EazyStock."*

The spreadsheet got so complex that it broke Oliver's laptop! Now, EazyStock takes care of ABC analysis and groups items appropriately to prioritize management efforts effectively.

Elise and Claire find the availability report extremely useful now that they are tasked with ensuring high product availability and can easily share it across the business.

"Having all the information in one spot is extremely user-friendly and informative to help with availability and planning."

As Claire explains, EazyStock makes it easy to plan and adapt varied availability goals for different items to changing strategic priorities.

"We can do a mass upload to change the data, and it's done. EazyStock updates buffer stock and order levels, in minutes. With the old system, I wouldn't know where to start." says Elise.

The excess stock report has helped them become stricter with what they stock, identifying what they can discontinue and which stock to prioritize selling or needs a sales push.

Automation features

Automation features have been revolutionary for Invopak. EazyStock automates the ordering process, saving valuable time and ensuring swift responses to changing lead times.

EazyStock's recommended orders have been a game-changer for Invopak, significantly improving efficiency. Rather than refreshing a spreadsheet and checking each line, Elise explains that now she simply opens recommended orders and confirms the EazyStock figure. This empowerment has significantly improved their efficiency and confidence in the system.

"EazyStock then sends the order to BC, eliminating the need to key in orders. It can be as simple as a one-line click to confirm: clicking export starts the process. The order is imported to BC, reviewed, released, and sent," explains Elise.

Claire loves that you can also look at each supplier individually. *"I'll go into my supplier and start with the risk of run-out report and recommended orders. We used to print out and review each line of a six-page spreadsheet printout. Then, I manually entered details to draft purchase orders while determining if a container was full and if I'd hit MOQs or coordinated lead times. Now I just filter the recommendations on screen, so it's nice and easy to deal with."*

Another EazyStock feature Invopak loves using is order fill-up; this is another excellent example of the added value the team has experienced through EazyStock's flexibility. Oliver worked with the CSM team to adapt the order fill-up functionality to their business needs, further helping order automation.

"It's not just a case of 'Here's the software, cheers for the money, see you next year for the price increases,'" says Oliver. *"It's been a constant evolution and a real feeling that people genuinely want us to get the best out of it."*

Exception-based management

The team loves the variety of system alerts highlighting issues they'd never be able to identify from their previous spreadsheets. When they're busy, they know they can prioritize.

EazyStock hasn't just helped procurement; the sales team loves it, too – even those scared of technology! Showcasing its functionality has helped improve customer service. Thanks to the information they can access, they can advise customers on order quantities so they order what they need instead of what they think they need.

For example, Claire noticed a customer was placing orders to meet an MOQ of 6,000 but ordering more frequently. Based on their previous usage, Claire could advise them that ordering 24,000 would be more cost-effective.

EazyStock also helps if a supplier questions an order. *"I snipped the EazyStock data to show what we'd sold, and the supplier came back and said, 'No problem'. Having it in black and white stops me questioning my workings."*

As Invopak's customers can have weather-dependent and seasonal items, such as paint and solvent, EazyStock can identify them to ensure they are replenished accordingly.

Order schedules and substitution management

Invopak imports from European factories, which can bring challenges during summer shutdowns. To prevent stockouts, they use supplier calendars, where they can input closure periods.

Oliver declares, *"The last two years have been streets ahead of anything we've had in place."*

"We'll pull out all of the items that we hold, such as printed and bespoke items, and get the sales team to ask their customers to forecast over the shutdown period.", says Claire. *"Based on what the customer has told us and the data in EazyStock, we know exactly what they will use over that shutdown, so we can decide what to bring in before that supplier closes."*

Claire and Elise also use the order review calendars to coordinate team holidays and front-load orders to avoid work coverage issues and relieve stress. Elise feels much more relaxed because she knows that she's covered. *"I put my schedules in EazyStock, and it knows I will be away."*

EazyStock's ability to handle substitutions has enormous benefits. Sometimes, printed packaging might need updating if regulations change, a new logo is needed, or the customer changes. Before, Invopak would lose track of these and end up stocking four versions of the same item, leading to obsolete stock. Being able to track this more closely means they can seamlessly carry the forecasts forward to the new item code and sell the older stock first.

Onboarding and Customer Success Managers

Oliver only has positive things to say about the EazyStock team. *"When we first met the customer success team of Cristina and Mark, they were really friendly, and there was a genuine desire for us to succeed."*

Invopak's dedicated Customer Success Manager, Cristina, provided bespoke training sessions to ensure new people could catch up quickly when they joined the team so they could catch up quickly, start using the system, and see the benefits immediately.

"I tailored the training to the team's requirements and availability, as there were varying levels of software experience. For example, I would organize sessions on more advanced topics, such as order schedules and KPIs for the EazyStock champions, while catering for the needs of new users through different onsite workshop sessions."

The team found the face-to-face training beneficial, and Cristina provided copies of the presentations, documents, and recordings.

Two years later, Cristina and the team have quarterly sessions, but Oliver clarifies, *"She's always available whenever we need her".*

Keeping the same named contact throughout the journey means customers get consistent support. This is a key part of the Customer Success Manager role at EazyStock and important to Cristina.

"As well as our regular reviews to understand if we can add more value to the team, if any support queries come through that need more than just an email, we'll troubleshoot this with a screen share because it's easier to understand and probably faster to resolve as well."

When asked how Oliver feels about looking back, he knows it was the right decision. *"I feel vindicated because I had to justify the cost to the business. However, the results speak for themselves. EazyStock is a third-party provider we hold up as a shining example of how things should be and the minimum levels we expect. If providers aren't meeting those levels, we review them."*

Elise echoes this sentiment. *"When asked by our IT team if we still needed EazyStock, they couldn't stop us talking! We told them this software has changed our lives."*

Claire agrees. *"I'd never used a system like this, and since I've started using it, this feels like how easy it should be. The old system was just unnecessarily hard work. It's only now using a system like EazyStock that you're like, 'wow, this is what it actually should be like working in procurement.'"*

Oliver and the team have confidence in the EazyStock, so they *"rarely question anything because it just works. It pulls the data from the right place, and everything is mapped. I'm glad we made the effort to get everything mapped properly because we get value from it."*
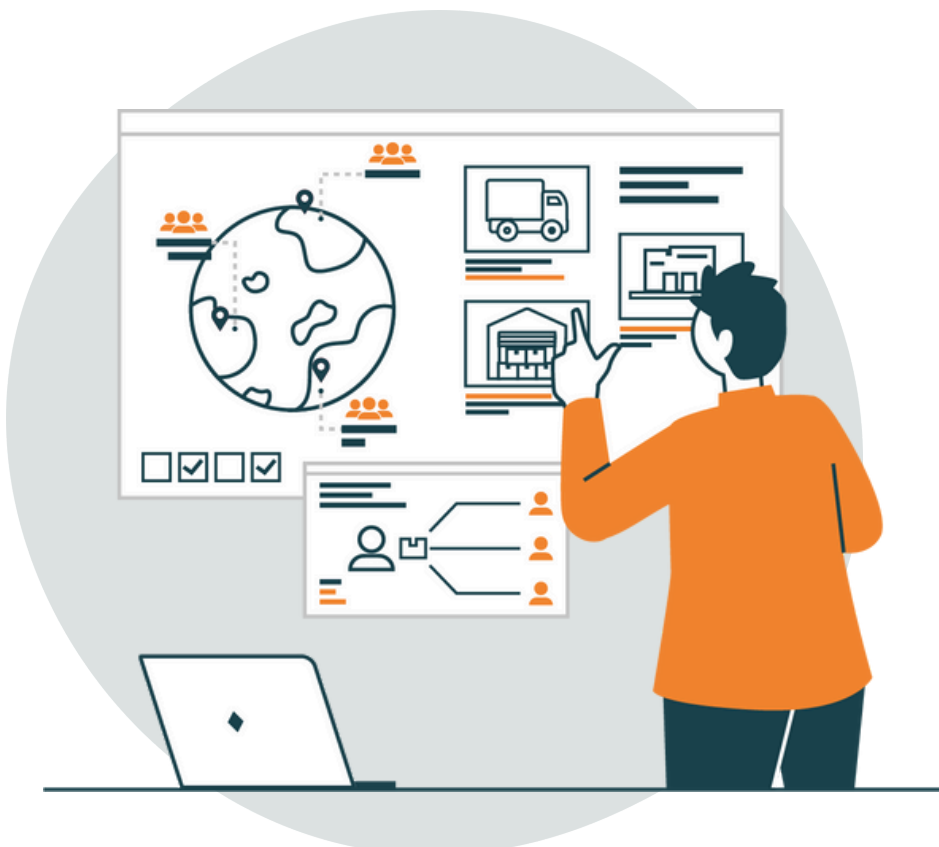
EazyStock's benefits have more than returned the investment in the system, and Oliver wouldn't return to their old ways.

"If we were to replace EazyStock now, it would be tough. We'd probably need to employ three or four people. We'd need a business analyst, two admin assistants, and an assistant buyer, which would cost significantly more than EazyStock."

These results are just the beginning for Invopak. Oliver is looking forward to even more success as the team works with Cristina to unlock further EazyStock functionality.

If you'd like to learn more about how EazyStock can transform your inventory management processes, speak to one of our experts.

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Find out more

To find out how EazyStock can help your business, get in touch.

Book a demo