

Millions of possibilities with WinMan

John Sankey is a family-run business that prides itself on hand making exquisite, characterful furniture. All of our furniture is designed and individually hand made in an old Derbyshire.

JOHN SANKEY™



John Sankey is one of the UK's leading sofa and chair manufacturers, offering a vast range of options across four furniture brands, with every item made to an individual customer order. At the heart of its ability to deliver a highly bespoke service is a 'Product Configurator' within its WinMan manufacturing ERP software.

Director Craig Charlton says:

“Because of the bespoke work that we do, every single order has the potential to be unique. The customer goes into the furniture shop and can build the exact piece of furniture they want. Once they have chosen the model and size they can select seat cushions in one fabric, back cushions in another, piping in a third fabric.”

John Sankey Manager Bob Ashcroft continues:

“We have 500 different fabrics, 15 different leg colors and lots of other options – we have millions of combinations. So it is obviously important to get that out into the manufacturing arena correctly. The

Product Configurator is the tool we use to create the order for each specific one-off item. It generates the order and creates a schedule of the work involved – including labor time for each process – and generates a bill of materials.”

To enter a sales order, you launch the Configurator, choose the specific model you want and then select the different options you want to specify – body fabric, cushions, piping, legs, etc. For each option, the Configurator opens a selection box offering all the possible choices. The Configurator knows what styles and fabrics are allowed for each brand and only offers those choices. Finally you select the 'structure' – which defines the specific version of the product you want.



“There can be lots of different versions of the same product, says Bob Ashcroft.

It is mainly to do with fire regulations and different options that you have chosen. So, for example, if we sold a chair in fabric and sold the same chair in leather there will be a different bill of materials and the labor will be different too. It takes longer to cut leather, longer to sew it and longer to upholster it. So you need a different structure for the work you are going to do.

As you select all the different options, you are building up the works order bill of materials as you go along. When you have finished, the Configurator will create a back-to-back manufacturing order and a sales order. When you confirm the sales order it will launch the manufacturing order – and behind each manufacturing order is the bill of materials that it has created through the configuration process.”

The Configurator can also provide pricing information for each option.

Into Production

John Sankey’s manufacturing process starts with the raw timber from which the wood shop makes all the frame components. These are then assembled in the fabrication shop.

Meanwhile fabric is delivered, patterns cut on a CNC machine, and panels sewn together.

The frames, fabric and sundry bought-in items such as cut-to-size foam pieces are then delivered to one of three upholstery cells – each dedicated to a specific brand – where the piece of furniture is completed. It is then bagged and sent to the despatch area ready for delivery.

Planning Production

Production planning starts with the manufacturing orders created by the Configurator, which are allocated to specific teams and grouped together into daily production plans.

Bob Ashcroft says

“We have to decide up-front which orders we are planning into which team and create a daily ‘work to’ list which we call a production plan. Each order on that plan is ranked according to priority, specifying the order in which it has to be made. We group together a number of orders per production plan and one production plan equals one day’s work for one team. In terms of timing, the wood mill is working on an order at the same time as the cutting department is working on it, so that the cloth and the wood come together at the right time at the upholstery team stage.”

He then uses the information held in WinMan to help him plan production against available capacity.

“I use WinMan to give me an overall rough-cut view of what I have lined up waiting to be done in terms of labor times per department and where there are any bottlenecks, and I do that for each process. I then decide the minute detail of which orders I’m going to send to which team on which day. Once I’ve done that, I feed that information into WinMan and give each production plan a unique number based on the week and day. We use a program in WinMan to rank the sequence we are putting the works order in – telling the system that this order is rank 1, 2 3, 4 or 5 in priority. When we print the production plans that everyone is working to it is in ‘work to’ order. They start at the top and work their way down.”

“The underlying advantage of WinMan for John Sankey was its flexibility and the ease with which it could be tailored to suit the company’s specific needs.”



Transport Allocation

Once the orders have been made, they need to be dispatched to the right customers at the right time – which is where WinMan’s ‘Transport Allocation’ module comes into play.

“When we are deciding which orders we are going to place on the production plan we are also thinking about transport, says Bob Ashcroft. We decide what is going on each van load and input that information into WinMan. You can simply drag the sales orders onto different delivery runs.”

WinMan then produces van loading sheets for the dispatch area showing exactly what is supposed to be going out on each van.

These are similar to the production plans and list all the sales orders line by line for each delivery with details of the customer – including contact details, a description of the product and the amount of space it will take up on the van.

“As far as van capacity is concerned, we calculate the space that each item will take up in terms of seats. So a chair is one seat, a two-seater sofa is two seats and so on. And we know how many seats we can get on a van,”

The orders are ranked in drop order, depending on the route the driver will be taking, and loaded in reverse order, and that information is also held in WinMan.

“If you look at the sales order on WinMan you can click on the transport tab and it will tell you when it is due to be delivered,” says Bob Ashcroft.

Traceability is Crucial

WinMan also has an important role to play in providing traceability from raw materials to the finished product.

As Craig Charlton explains:

“Every roll of fabric that comes in has its own lot number on the system and we can follow that right the way through. This is important as the audit trail on things like fire retardancy certificates has to run all the way from the buying process through to knowing which specific rolls of material have been used on each sofa. With WinMan, the traceability is second to none.”

He adds that this detailed traceability can also provide a benefit for the end customer.

“You need to make sure that all the cushions, for example, are made from the same roll. And if a customer later wants to order some more cushions, say, or another chair, we can go back to the original supplier of that fabric and see if they have any more of that batch left.”

The wood is all traceable right back to when a batch of wood first comes in too, and this will become increasingly important as the company moves towards FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification for the use of sustainable timber.

Bob Ashcroft says:

“We have the fields for that built into WinMan. At the moment we mostly use FSC timber but are not yet FSC-accredited. We will be going down that route and have primed WinMan for that.”

Key WinMan Benefit

“The underlying advantage of WinMan for John Sankey was it’s flexibility and the ease with which it could be tailored to suit the company’s specific needs.”

says Bob Ashcroft.

“The WinMan software is extremely configurable. It was very easy to tweak the system to our exact requirements. It has saved us labor in administration and it has cut out processes. And the processes that remain are quicker than they were on the old system.”

He says the whole administration process has become streamlined: WinMan is geared towards supporting lean principles of reducing waste effort by supporting an organization’s optimum business processes.

“It is easier to track production, and because of the minute value assigned to the orders it is a lot easier to maintain schedules - and the analysis and dashboards are 100 times better than we had before. Our old ERP system simply didn’t do a lot of the things we wanted to do – such as the transport allocation and the production planning. We had three or four different databases and spreadsheets all over the place – so we were always plagued with multiple entries and transcription errors. Now it is all in WinMan – there are benefits all round, but maybe that is the biggest benefit of all. I would never want to go back to what we had before.”



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