



Howden drives innovation and efficiency with Smartsheet

Faster reporting, smarter resourcing, and automated processes that make life easier. Across every area of the business, Smartsheet helps Howden work more dynamically.

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The ability to share information easily across sites is fundamental to our success and growth. Smartsheet is our common source of truth, helping us collaborate globally with full confidence, efficiency, and visibility.

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Willie Vance, Technology
Project Management Lead at
Howden Technology



Customer:

Howden

Industry:

Energy and Utilities

Organization Size:

Large (1,000 - 9,999 employees)

Region:

EMEA

Website:

howden.com

Howden is an established global business that designs, engineers, and supplies air and gas handling solutions to optimise the vital process of its customers.

Background

For an established global business like Howden – which designs, engineers, and supplies air and gas handling solutions to optimise the vital processes of its customers – collaboration, efficiency and innovation are fundamental.

But with over 6,000 employees across 26 countries – and an evolving solution offering that spans complex industries such as Power, Chemicals, Infrastructure and beyond – achieving this isn't easy. Associates have to juggle many fast moving projects. And as Howden has discovered, the more globalised operations become, the harder it is to ensure everybody is on the same page.

Howden employs a mix of ambitious engineers, programme controllers, project managers and support staff across the world – all of whom work together to help their customers deliver sustainable air and gas handling solutions, often in complex environments.

Solution

Willie Vance, Technology Project Management Lead at Howden Technology, provides professional project management support across Howden Technology, liaising with colleagues globally to drive projects forward. However, in recent years, Vance and his colleagues have seen specific issues and challenges reoccur across projects.

With so much global innovation, keeping track of projects, progress, and data had become a serious headache. *"We were sharing Excel spreadsheets,"* says Vance. *"But it was never clear if we were all looking at the same file, or if that file was the most up-to-date version. During our fortnightly progress calls with colleagues in India and China, it was sometimes unclear whether we were on the same page."*

The team also struggled with slow, manual reporting processes. Project managers and engineers presented project information in various formats, all based on personal preference.

All of these issues made it challenging to manage employee time effectively and gain clear visibility

In a Nutshell:

Automating data reduced time spent on reporting by

60-75%

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In our monthly reporting, we use four blockers with information relating to a project – such as key milestones, risks and potential issues, financial status and mitigating actions required to ensure the project remains on track. And all of this information is pulled into a PowerPoint, a task which previously took at least 30 or 40 minutes per slide. With Smartsheet, we've developed an application that draws this information in automatically to populate the slides – reducing the time it takes down to less than ten minutes per slide. That's a huge saving, and really boosts our efficiency.

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Willie Vance, Technology Project Management Lead at Howden Technology

into projects, which made understanding and balancing workloads even harder.

Vance knew that Howden needed to find a better way forward – and that the solution had to work for everyone, considering their different preferences and geographical locations. Vance searched for a solution that could help, and spoke with colleagues around the business. A key driver was the ability to display information in a variety of different ways, such as a Kanban board, while also ensuring that work and projects could be clearly visually represented with Gantt-style views.

After researching the market, Vance identified Smartsheet as a potential solution – and initial trials quickly showed that the platform was a fantastic fit for the business.

“We were soon able to realise a host of benefits, from creating a single source for data to more streamlined planning, faster reporting and easier visualisation of tasks,” says Vance. “We discovered we could use it in a host of innovative ways, like automating legacy processes and boosting company culture.”

A common source of truth for projects

Vance looked to Smartsheet to ensure everyone could have access to accurate, up-to-date data. The team can now capture and share the same information in the same standardised, consistent ways. Everyone can efficiently interact with the right data on daily calls using tailored solutions for the specific issue at hand.

A flexible platform that can show the same information in different ways, Smartsheet has also improved how the team manages projects.

“At a company like Howden, you’re working with different groups of people – from project managers to engineers. And if there’s one thing engineers don’t like, it’s sifting through a 300-line Gantt chart. You just completely lose the audience. Fortunately, Smartsheet has the flexibility to ensure everyone can see information in a way that suits them.”

In a Nutshell:

Vance and his team have also used Smartsheet to improve general HR processes, like holiday booking, which play a key part in effective resource management. Previously, holiday booking was done manually with paper forms – a ‘frankly archaic’ system, as Vance was all too aware.



Building project plans within Smartsheet and then pulling that data into Resource Management by Smartsheet gives us real visibility. Not only on a resource profile, but also over our outlying project budget. We’ve never had that before, and this solution has brought an immense amount of power to us.



Willie Vance

Smarter, faster reporting

Before Smartsheet, Vance and his colleagues spent a lot of time collating project information and status updates for the key monthly project review meetings. A reliance on manual processes meant the team spent hours gathering historical information in various formats, such as Excel spreadsheets and PDFs. Once they'd compiled this data, they had no consistent way of attaching files, adding comments, or providing context.

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More effective resourcing

Howden's teams are always busy with numerous fast-moving projects. But managing work well isn't just about completing projects quickly and efficiently, so Howden is keen to ensure employees have the time and space they need to thrive.

Resource Management by Smartsheet has proved crucial in giving the team visibility of resource loading, along with the scope to spot if the right people are involved in a project – and if they're going to have adequate time to do the work. This has allowed Howden to work with an Agile project management philosophy, solve problems quickly, and develop the right solutions.

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Howden has even used Smartsheet to specifically nurture a strong culture through the COVID-19 pandemic, creating an internal platform where associates can post updates, share light-hearted fun, and of course, keep track of each other's availability and location.

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People across our global community are starting to understand the power of Smartsheet. Whenever we're planning a new project or initiative, our default assumption is now: let's use Smartsheet. And for us, that's a great direction of travel.

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Willie Vance

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Vance has since developed an automated holiday booking sheet; whenever a request is raised, it sends an automatic email to their manager, who can review and approve. The holiday request sheet is linked into a planner that gives managers full visibility of who’s on holiday and when – at the moment this has been implemented for the Renfrew Team but roll out to the wider Howden Technology Teams in Denmark and Holland is being considered.

Building a strong company culture

All of the above has combined to create a better culture of collaboration and communication within the business. But Howden has even used Smartsheet to specifically nurture a strong culture through the COVID-19 pandemic, creating an internal platform where associates can post updates, share light-hearted fun, and of course, keep track of each other’s availability and location.

“After lockdown began, we developed a COVID-19 dashboard,” reports Vance. “This helped people understand the different situations in other countries (like local restrictions), helping us work better together. But, crucially, it helped us draw together as a community – which was something we all needed during those difficult lockdown periods.”

Ultimately, this reflects how crucial Smartsheet has been for Howden. Vance is already planning to help roll out the benefits of Smartsheet for his global colleagues, helping them build relevant applications as needed to ensure they have tailored capabilities.

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Customer:

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