



## **Case Study**

### **Customer Service Turnaround Blinds and Soft Furnishings**

## Improving customer service: *Blinds, shutters and awnings*

The UK blinds and shutters industry has responded rapidly to changes in style and design, demands for convenience and developments in the need for energy saving, environmental control and sun protection. The result is a very buoyant market area that has grown by over 60% in the last five years.

Nevertheless, rising costs and cheap imports from low cost countries mean that on-going efficiency improvements are essential in order to keep ahead of competition and to ensure customer expectations for value and service are met.



“We achieved the objectives set out for us in our terms of reference, enabling Hillarys to remove £2m of working capital from their supply chain whilst eliminating some major inhibitors of future sales growth.”

**Fraser Geekie**  
*Director*  
The Consultancy  
Company

### The client

Hillarys is the UK's leading made-to-measure blinds company. Formed in 1971 it has a turnover of approximately £80 million. A manufacturer of fashion blinds, Hillarys has a route to market through a direct sales force, consisting of 850 self-employed 'agents' which sell and install blinds into UK households [and offices?].

The company is the largest specialist blinds manufacturer in the UK producing 25,000 blinds per week. There are two manufacturing sites, Nottingham and Washington (Tyne and Wear).

The company have their own distribution fleet of 17 vehicles operating over 55 routes.

### The challenge

Despite a manufacturing time of 30 minutes, the elapsed time from an order being taken by an agent and the blind being fitted was around four weeks.

Hillarys recognised the limitations of their distribution process and its impact on cost and service.

They asked the Consultancy Company to reduce the elapsed time from order placement to fitting by at least ten days and to provide a consistent level of service that allowed a fitting date to be given at the point of order taking.



“Customer expectations of service increase every year, and it is essential that we keep our order completion times competitive and that our agents are able to keep their delivery promises to customers.”

**Tim Holland**  
*Materials Director*  
Hillarys

## Our approach

The major time loss and cause of uncertainty from order placement to fitting was in the post manufacture period. That is, the time waiting for despatch and the time for receipt by the Agents. To address this, our consultants worked with Hillarys staff on a phased approach, to locate and improve the processes involved.

### Analysis

In order to reduce the order to delivery lead-time we took a holistic view of the complete order fulfilment process, mapping each activity from the initial agent visit through to final delivery. The resultant analysis was presented to the Client Management Team along with an assessment of the tangible benefits that could accrue from the adoption of different processes and procedures.

### Best Practice

The Consultancy Company then ran a series of facilitated workshops. Our consultants introduced best practice processes against current procedures at Hillarys; the output of this was to create a programme owned and actionable by the Client Management Team.

### Training

Throughout the implementation phase The Consultancy Company provided a project review forum and appropriate skills training.

### Communications

In parallel, in order to reduce the time taken to arrange an appointment our consultants reviewed all call-centre practises and Agent communication methods. Implementation of our recommendations subsequently delivered the required performance change

## Benefits

- Order to delivery lead-time reduced from up to four weeks to fourteen days maximum.
- Distribution costs reduced by a massive 17%.
- Robust production planning processes introduced, with overtime reduced by 5%.
- All customer calls now achieve a response visit within 48 hours.
- Call centre management/supervision reduced by 10%.

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