

**PAST  TIMES** Past Times

Reduced  
labour cost

**4.5%** ↓



## Past Times reduce labour bill by £570,000 (4.5%) by implementing WorkPlace Systems workforce management consultancy recommendations

### Summary

Past Times have saved £570,000 over the last 11 months due to a workforce management consultancy exercise carried out by WorkPlace Systems. By challenging existing staffing levels the work measurement study and analysis has led to better staffing efficiency and better management understanding of store tasks and the time taken to complete these tasks. Additional benefits have included a better understanding of the Jewellery selling process and a simpler labour budgeting process for new store openings.

### The Company

Past Times specialises in developing and selling quality products inspired by important design periods throughout history. The variety of products is extraordinary, ranging from household accessories and jewellery to gifts, toys, clothes, books, DVDs and much more.

Past Times was founded in 1986 as a mail order company and opened its first store in Oxford in June 1987. It now has over 120 stores throughout the UK and Ireland.

### The Opportunity

As with most retailers payroll cost is the largest expense to the business and Past Times wanted to challenge their existing staff budget to ensure that there was an appropriate level of staffing at each store.

“There were a number of different questions in my mind and we wanted to test whether the hours allocated were right or if there were too few or too many hours being worked in store” explained Mark Johnson, Head of Retail Operations. Past Times had already trialed a number of different changes to store operating hours by reducing them by 5%, 10% and 15% with differing results but Past Times were keen to engage with an industry expert to provide analytical measurement and more robust analysis.



After consulting a number of potential suppliers, WorkPlace Systems was chosen to carry out a workforce management work measurement project. "We chose WorkPlace Systems because they understood that it wasn't a scheduling problem but one of understanding the workload that needed to be done and then schedule against that workload and by doing this exercise it would highlight where there was any wasted hours", continued Mark.

The consultancy exercise recommendations had to ensure that any reduction in hours did not have an impact on sales. The creation of an hourly staffing requirement based on the shapes of business would ensure there was a close match of staffing to sales and footfall in each of the stores.

### **The Solution**

WorkPlace Systems conducted a consultancy exercise that studied all in-store work activity across 3 different locations, with specific process variants being measured across a number of additional stores. The measurement covered all store tasks including; delivery, replenishment, display maintenance, merchandising, selling, service at tills, communications, cash procedures and cleaning. Using the derived labour standards a framework staffing model was created that would allow each store to have the correct number of hours (optimum staffing). Once the study had concluded a number of workshops were conducted with regional and store managers in a move to rollout a new staffing model across all 120 stores.

"The results were used to ensure each store had the correct number of hours for the work to be done, our approach allowed store managers to increase hours if sales allowed. The analysis also allowed us to better understand the important Jewellery sales process and manage the performance of each store in this critical area", stated Mark.

### **The Results**

The work measurement study and workload demand analysis has led to a greater understanding of staffing efficiency and it showed that there was overstaffing at certain times and during peak trading periods such as the run up to Mothers Day it was not necessary to increase staff hours as had previously been budgeted for.

During Christmas 2009 when there was unprecedented heavy snow causing chaos across the UK, this weather had a significant detrimental impact on UK retail sales. As Past Times were now able to more confidently and accurately forecast the work required at each store and given the more flexible nature of their Christmas workforce, Past Times were able to adjust staffing to reflect the reduced store activity i.e. reduced deliveries and reduced footfall and save on staff costs.

Over the last 11 months Past Times have managed to reduce their labour costs by £570,000 without affecting customer service and sales. There have been no redundancies or contract changes for existing employees.

"With such a significant cost saving, the saving has enabled investing in other areas of the business including; more new store openings, training, web and investments in branding", concluded Mark Johnson

### **What of the Future?**

Currently Past Times have saved 4.5 % of their payroll and are hoping to increase that over the next financial year. The potential for additional benefit is well recognised and Past Times are currently working with WorkPlace Systems across a number of further opportunities to improve service and maintain a competitive cost base.

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