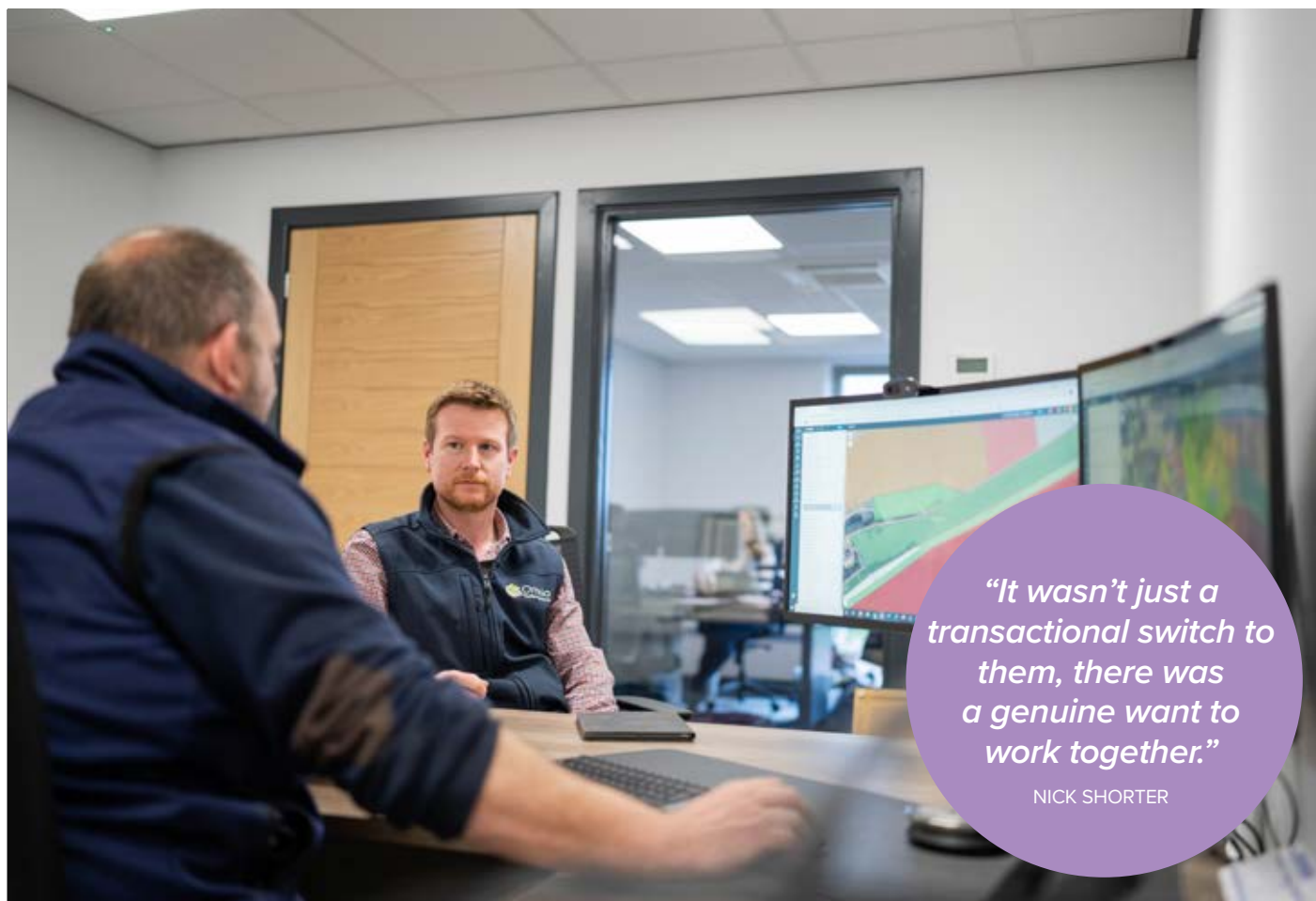


Making the switch



"It wasn't just a transactional switch to them, there was a genuine want to work together."

NICK SHORTER

Following the Omnia upgrade launch more than a year ago, growers with businesses of all sizes are finding the lure of an all-in-one farm management software solution too tempting to ignore. *CPM* finds out what's involved in making the migration.

By Janine Adamson

Deciding to swap providers whether that be energy, mobile phone network, home insurance or finance-related matters, can often be laden in administration and unwanted hassle.

Add in the fact that in the case of farm management software, this can mean juggling multiple companies, various data streams and a wealth of historical information – while maintaining 'business as usual' – and it's understandable why the task may be perceived daunting.

Yet since the launch of its upgrade

more than a year ago, Omnia has upped the ante in this space, including ensuring the migration process is as pain-free as possible, and that users can access continued support well beyond the initial change-over period.

EXPERTISE

Key to this is a highly-skilled UK-based workforce both in person and behind the scenes, highlights Hutchinsons' head of digital agronomy, Lewis McKerrrow. "Whether that's our digital specialists who visit customers on-farm, or speaking to our Omnia



Support team

Key to ensuring migration to Omnia is pain-free, is a highly-skilled UK-based workforce both in person and behind the scenes, highlights Hutchinsons' Lewis McKerrrow.



Knowledge hub launch

Omnia's Oliver Wood says the recently launched knowledge hub features a range of short training courses and learning paths to go beyond 'how-to' and into 'why'.

support team on the telephone or through video link, someone will be available to answer queries.

"Often this can depend on the IT literacy of the individual client, but for those who are confident, we also have a suite of help videos within the Omnia platform itself, to guide users through the different processes, step-by-step," he explains.

To rewind a little, Omnia was relaunched by Hutchinsons with the aim of producing a new style of farm management software. More than just a technology tool, its upgrade was promised to be a fundamental shift in agricultural practice to ensure productivity and sustainability gains.

With such a compelling offer – from streamlining crop production plans to simplifying record-keeping – growers with farm businesses of all sizes are now taking the plunge and making the switch.

Head of Omnia, Oliver Wood, says

in many ways, the process couldn't be easier. "It usually takes a few days to get on board, but for a simple holding, it might involve just a few hours to set up a new account. It varies depending on the complexity of the farming system," he explains.

"Importantly, we encourage all individuals to be active during that setup process because it means they're hands-on with the platform as quickly as possible and learning as they go."

Lewis adds that from the team's perspective, first steps are to understand a grower's existing system(s) and what data will be available. Acknowledging not all individuals use digital solutions, in some cases, this might mean making the journey from a paper-based approach.

Then, it's considering what's a priority for that particular grower. "It's usually relatively simple to import the basics over such as field boundaries and cropping rotations. We then look

Stress-free migration

How one Scottish Omnia user rates the recent upgrade

Although it wasn't a hard switch to Omnia for Graham Innes, rather a gradual migration, he says the process couldn't have been simpler.

Graham – who co-runs contract farming business A P Innes in the Scottish borders – manages 850ha comprising winter wheat, winter and spring barley, spring oats, oilseed rape and vining peas.

His first experience of Omnia came around 3-4 years ago when he wanted to find a digital solution to manage nutrition applications and seed use. At the time, Omnia couldn't fulfil all of his requirements, but since the upgrade, that's changed.

"Once Omnia could offer the additional functionality we required, such as evaluating gross margins, and creating and applying crop protection plans and programmes, we made the decision to fully move over from our previous provider.

"We were warned to allow a couple of days for the migration to complete, but after a few hours I received a phone call informing me it was ready to go. It genuinely couldn't have been any easier," he stresses.

Regarding the process, Graham explains it was all done for him

by Omnia's tech team, creating a stress-free experience. And now, with everything in one platform, he's using it every day both from the office and through his mobile phone.

"There's such a benefit from being able to see the live details of the very field you're stood in – from the crop variety to Terramap soil mapping results – all with a few simple clicks. And importantly for me, the app itself has improved significantly since the upgrade. Whereas before it was quite clunky, now it's much better and works consistently," he adds.

Now well in his stride with the technology, Graham says whenever there's been a problem, he's preferred to contact the Omnia support team via telephone or email. "They are excellent, but even this aspect has improved as time has gone by, which is reassuring as more customers migrate over to Omnia."

Perhaps contrary to expectation, Hutchinsons doesn't manage the agronomy for A P Innes, instead it's overseen by an independent provider. Graham points out that all parties are content with how Omnia is performing, and he believes it demonstrates it's not just for existing Hutchinsons customers.



Speedy switch

Although Graham Innes was told to allow a couple of days for the migration to complete, after just a few hours he received a phone call saying it was ready to go.

"Our agronomist uses Omnia to input his spray recommendations for the business, so as promised, everything is in one place. They can also utilise the help desk in the same way I would, although he's so familiar with the platform now that he rarely has to."

A final aspect that's significantly impressed Graham is Omnia's integration with machinery through Omnia Connect. "Having this synchronicity is a big win; I'm extremely happy," he concludes.



Built for success

Because Omnia has been built from mapping fundamentals, it sets it apart from other solutions which have been developed using databases, believes Velcourt's Nick Shorter.

▶ at aspects such as yield data and soil analysis results," highlights Lewis.

For larger or more complex businesses, the Omnia team will devise a defined action plan, taking a project management-style approach. As well as the over-riding key objectives, this takes into account the most appropriate time to move over to Omnia within the season, and the range and experience of individuals requiring training.

This systematic approach was critical for Velcourt when navigating the migration to Omnia, shares CEO, Nick Shorter. With 44 farm managers and more than 100 farms in its portfolio, the goal was to make a 'hard switch' across all sites and hectares.

"Previously, our farms were operating using Gatekeeper for record-keeping plus various additional platforms for general management and precision-type activities. We wanted a route to assimilate all of that function in one place," he explains.

Having made the decision to switch to Omnia, with a desired launch date of 1 September 2024, the work began six months prior when a project management team was identified. Comprising both Omnia and Velcourt individuals, they then created a shared action plan.

"Omnia's in-house tech team – which importantly, is UK-based – worked hard to ensure that all of the functionality we required was

ready for live date. It wasn't just a transactional switch to them, there was a genuine want to work together.

"As with everything, there were a few niggles and additional desires that we identified during that process. But, it was rewarding and greatly appreciated to see the updates being made, often based on our individual feedback," says Nick.

Because Omnia has been built from mapping fundamentals, it sets it apart from other solutions in the market which have been developed using databases, he believes. "Mapping has become key in modern systems. As we're using Omnia for telematics and field analysis, it's proving very intuitive.

"Furthermore, its general functionality has been designed from scratch with UK agriculture in mind – as a user, this is clear. It's also excellent in terms of cloud-based inter-device functionality – whether that's an iPad or laptop, across individual users – it's live and updated."

"Through the business, we can access highly experienced BASIS- and FACTS-qualified individuals, which is critical when it comes to compliance and agronomic tasks."

FURTHER UPDATES

Since its relaunch, Omnia has revealed additional functions and builds to the platform as part of its continuous development. Most recently, this has meant an upgrade to the report module, and, a new knowledge hub, points out Oliver.

"We wanted to expand on the existing help videos to provide a more rounded user experience. As such, the knowledge hub features a range of short training courses and learning paths to go beyond 'how-to' and into 'why'.

"There's a blend of video, text, audio and quiz material all to encourage user engagement. The Omnia team will then monitor the trends within the hub, so we can respond to the most popular aspects and develop those further," he adds.

NEXT STEPS

A function Nick would like to see developed is inter-business analysis, to enable comparisons to be made between individual farms. "This would be very useful for a business like Velcourt, or for those who may be managing multiple sites; producing one report would be powerful."

However, something he says he's been impressed with from the start has

been the ongoing support, which continues even now. "It's about ensuring reality means expectation, including identifying additional functions so Omnia can expand and grow."

Lewis believes the

reason why Hutchinsons is ideally placed to deliver such an agile, living solution for the industry, is because of the wealth of expertise at hand.

"Through the business, we can access highly experienced BASIS- and FACTS-qualified individuals, which is critical when it comes to compliance and agronomic tasks.

"These individuals supplement the Omnia team's knowledge even further. We can also reach out to crop or area specialists, who are at the fore of regulation, product stewardship and regional nuances." ●

Digital Direction

As arable farms progress towards a digital future it can be difficult to know how to navigate data generation, capture and analysis, in order to provide worthwhile benefits to a business.

Through its Digital Direction series, CPM is working with some of the industry's leading companies to understand the latest data-driven solutions from an on-farm perspective.

CPM would like to thank Hutchinsons for sponsoring this article and for providing privileged access to staff and the material used to help bring it together.

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