

Success Story

BLC Forklifts: Taking the heavy lifting out of finance

BLC Forklifts boosts its financial confidence, increases forecasting visibility, and grows its reputation using Sage Business Cloud Accounting.

“There’s a feature in Sage we can turn on, and then as soon as invoices become overdue, customers get a reminder and it just stops us pestering.”

Joe Daniels

Director, BLC Forklifts



The challenge

BLC Forklifts grew from a team of six to hundreds of freelance employees, 100+ trucks to rent, and thousands of customers. It needed a system that could remove the pain of manual invoicing and give it forecasting abilities months ahead, to help stock management.



The solution

Using Sage Business Cloud Accounting gave the business financial confidence to take on bigger, longer-term projects while successfully managing stock levels. Invoicing was cut to hours instead of several days a week, freeing up time for the team to build its word-of-mouth reputation across the community.



Results

- ~ 4 days a week saved through Sage Copilot automation and invoicing
- Better visibility on finances at month-end
- Time saved goes back into managing customer relationships for word-of-mouth brand-building.



Company
BLC Forklifts Ltd.

Location
Surrey, UK

Industry
Industrial Machinery

Sage Products
Sage Business Cloud Accounting

BLC Forklifts Ltd.

BLC Forklifts Ltd. is a forklift rental, service, and sales business based in Surrey. Started in 1992, it has served thousands of customers, with a small permanent team and hundreds of freelance contractors.



BLC Forklifts started in 1992 by a team of six with limited stock but big ambitions.

Today, it's run by Managing Director, Terry Daniels, and son, Joe Daniels, Director, and includes a multitude of contractors and engineers servicing nearly 100 trucks that serve thousands of customers. BLC provides forklift truck hire, repairs, and sales across Surrey and South East England.

Four days lost to manual admin

From zero forklifts to more than 100 trucks on the hire fleet, the business has grown steadily since the 90s. It has served thousands of businesses, from furniture suppliers and caterers to film sets and football stadium advertisers.

Keeping tabs on stock availability is an essential component to be able to serve several customers at once. Terry explains: "people say, I want a truck for one day, and then five days later they say, 'Can we keep it another week?'" The business has to be flexible to accommodate both the stock and the logistics of this. Joe expands on this, "you'll get a good contractor [that] comes in and jumps you up another level, then you've got to try and make sure that's workable and you're still providing the right service to everyone."

Joe needed the ability to forecast a month or two ahead, to keep the business stocked with the right forklifts, including sustainable electric options, and to manage the flow when customers needed trucks for longer-term projects. "You need to have hire trucks out there that are on five-year contracts to keep the money coming in evenly. That's where we started building up the company."

As the tech-savvy member of the team Joe was frustrated. The old software was slow and office-based, "we were still on that old-school technology of where it was just on one computer and you couldn't move from there, and you have to manually back it up every day."

As Joe recalls, "our invoices go out at the end of the month because we hire on a monthly basis." Month-end invoices piled up. For Joe, this meant repeated, stressful contact with customers, trying to get them to pay their invoices on time.

Invoices took both Joe and an accountant three or four days to manually complete. "We wasted so many man-hours just because there was probably three or four of us all working on finances."



“I would have to write it on paper, would give it to the person who does our accounts. They’d then type out each individual invoice separately, and then we’d have to go down to the post office and post them. So, it’s very long-winded.”

“You’d have one week where you’d just write off, to just do invoicing and lock yourself away.”

Joe Daniels,
Director, BLC Forklifts

Automation for stress-free financials

Five years ago, the team switched to Sage giving them cloud-based accounting and Copilot assistance for invoice reminders. The savings were immediate. They gained back 5 days a month, invoicing now only taking a few hours. The BLC team could re-focus on customer relationships, making sure its personal touch was carried through to plans of expansion.

Terry is especially proud of those community relationships. “We always answer the phone within four rings.” Terry remains traditional in his approach to customers. “I’ll pop round and see you. And that’s the best thing to do. And then you meet someone, you set up a relationship.”

Joe is a fan of tech making life easier. Sage Business Cloud Accounting can send automatic invoice reminders. This reduces pressure on customers because they know they’ll get regular communications, so it seems less aggressive. “Now it’s just like a reminder, and they know when it was due or that it’s overdue, and they can just do it without any sort of negative connotations behind it.”

Visibility into the business finances has also improved, as the team can access the financials from anywhere, as Joe remarks, “everything’s updated live as-and-when. It’s easier.”

The level of automation means Joe saves time managing the month-end: “I can just do it straight away, and everything’s done straight there from one desk rather than two.”

“I just click one button and it does a whole statement run for all my customers and emails them all.”

Joe Daniels,
Director, BLC Forklifts



A forecasting solution for proactive planning

One of the biggest differences Joe has seen since using Sage, is that “it predicts how your cash flow is going to come in” and “it’s pretty good at forecasting where you’re going to be, at least in a month or a quarter’s time.”

For businesses like BLC Forklifts, forecasting is especially important, to know what budget there is in advance of jobs.

Joe explains, “you’re ordering a forklift truck, there’s three to four months lead time on that, so you need to know where you’re going to be in three to four months to be able to cover the invoices as and when it comes in.”

“Sage tells you how much money you’re going to have going out, and how much money you’ve expected to come in, or you do have in. You can balance and see exactly where that line is.”

Joe Daniels,
Director, BLC Forklifts



Community support with time for brand building

Joe continues to see the numbers clearly when it comes to future expansion, “we do have to make tough financial decisions, knowing, not just disposable income, but how much money we’ve got to play with.”

As a family business working with a range of other local firms who have collaborated since the 1990s, Terry and Joe like to encourage the next generation within their community. Joe explains, “if people needed sponsoring for kits or award ceremonies, we just stepped up and went in there. It’s been more about helping people out and sort of building a nice little family of people.”

“Everything goes full circle, and you’re in the community and you’re trusted.”

Joe Daniels,
Director, BLC Forklifts

Financial resilience and growth

For Joe, expansion continues to be at front of mind, even when dad Terry, now 80, retires. “The next five years, I’m just hoping that we carry on as we are, for being reliable and building up trust, and letting customers find us and know that they can trust us.”

Terry is proud that the recent growth has meant the business is ready to take on a bigger site, “we thought we’d be able to rent half of it off because we wouldn’t need it all. But now it’s too small.”

Using Sage has given BLC Forklifts the time and financial confidence to set up deep roots in the community. The team can make agile financial decisions and know they can expand thanks to word-of-mouth recommendations from local businesses for generations to come.



Sage

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