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Optimising Operations and Fulfilment with a Bespoke Web App Featuring Custom Sage 200 Integration

Monarch Education Furniture has been selling high-quality educational furniture (e.g., tray storage, cupboards, laptop charging trolleys) across the UK for nearly four decades. Over the years, they've earned a reputation for customer service and rapid fulfilment that sets them apart.

Monarch expedites lead times through carefully coordinated processes and clear communication between overseas suppliers, their local factory, and their delivery teams. They managed their processes for many years using a complex spreadsheet designed by a talented, Excel-savvy factory manager, but they came to face a major problem.

When the factory manager took a new job with another employer, Monarch was left with a business-critical spreadsheet that nobody knew how to modify or fix when something went wrong. Monarch continued to use the spreadsheet for several months following the manager's departure, but they needed a more flexible solution they could maintain without relying on an Excel guru.

"I always knew we would be somewhat exposed if our factory manager left. We had a business-critical spreadsheet that we continued to use, but we had no idea how to modify it. If something went wrong, we knew we'd be stuck."



— **Stuart Hopkin, Managing Director**
Monarch Education Furniture

Client

Monarch Education Furniture

Industry

Furniture manufacturing and sales

Challenges

Monarch relied on a complex Excel spreadsheet created by a talented factory manager. When the manager left, however, no one remained who could modify or fix the spreadsheet if something went wrong.

Solution

BTC repaired and improved the spreadsheet as an interim solution while building a powerful web app designed to interface with the Sage software.

Results

The app consolidated a variety of spreadsheets, optimised operational planning, improved efficiency, and provided a single source of truth for the many employees and managers who accessed it.

“The BTC team quickly understood what was happening with our spreadsheet and how to fix any issues in the interim. They also fully understood what we wanted to replicate in a web app, so they never had any real competition.”

— **Stuart Hopkin, Managing Director**
Monarch Education Furniture

Exploring solutions and finding a partner

Managing Director Stuart Hopkin and his team interviewed three development firms to explore their options. Potential solutions ranged from modifying and improving the existing spreadsheet to building a custom web application.

All three firms offered to fix the spreadsheet’s immediate issues, but each recommended building a web app as a long-term solution. Ideally, Monarch needed an app that could communicate directly with the SQL database in Sage 200, the company’s accounts package software. A web app would also enable logins from different users, anywhere in the world, providing a single source of truth with zero version-control issues.

“The other two companies we interviewed seemed to have a lot of the technical knowledge required, but they didn’t seem to have the level of professional organisation that Better Technology Consulting demonstrated,” says Stuart.

Monarch ultimately partnered with Better Technology Consulting (BTC), whose team committed to making the spreadsheet more usable in the short term while building a powerful web app that would replace the spreadsheet entirely.



Building a web app to interface with Sage

Once BTC improved the spreadsheet to keep operations running smoothly, they began working on the web app, which would take four months to complete. Meanwhile, they made themselves available to solve any challenges Stuart and his team faced with the spreadsheet.

“BTC was always on hand to help when we had trouble with the spreadsheet, looking through the code in the background, fixing the problem, and keeping us going while they built the web app,” says Stuart.

Monarch’s most important requirement was having a web app capable of interacting with the Sage 200, producing automatic updates from suppliers and allowing many different employees to log in at the same time. Having real-time updates would guide assembly line production, workforce allocation, delivery schedules, and more.

“It all moved very quickly, and BTC showed us many iterations of different concepts and modules along the way. This reassured us that BTC knew exactly what they were doing and that their work was in line with what we were expecting.”

— **Stuart Hopkin,**
Managing Director
Monarch Education Furniture

Collaborating with Sage to build a custom API

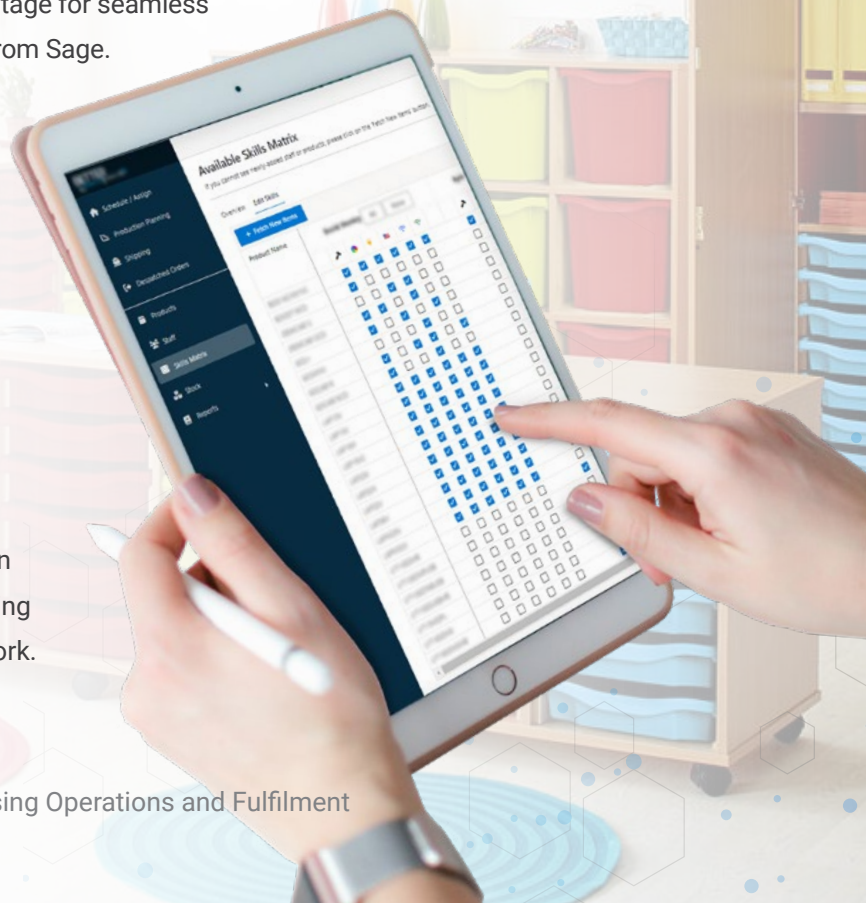
An API is the technology that allows two different applications to interact with each other, and BTC faced a major challenge because the Sage API was unable to populate an important field.

Not to be deterred, BTC reached out to Sage to find a solution. Over the next several months, BTC collaborated with the Sage development team to build an API for Monarch’s web app. The API set the stage for seamless integration, enabling the web app to draw data directly from Sage.

After four months, BTC delivered a web app which:

- ◆ Featured a dashboard summarising operational information at a glance
- ◆ Seamlessly interfaced with Sage 200 for rapid updates and reporting
- ◆ Allowed vendors and employees to access vital data from anywhere, at any time
- ◆ Optimised delivery planning for their fleet of vehicles

Once the app’s initial use proved successful, BTC began expanding its capabilities to support operational planning in other areas, such as furniture assembly and metalwork.



Expanding the web app's functionality

While most web app developers deliver a product and move on to the next client, BTC takes a different approach. Taking a web app live offers an information-rich data stream, allowing BTC to collaborate further with their clients to improve the app's functionality and expand its capabilities even further.

After retiring the main spreadsheet, BTC integrated additional spreadsheets into the web app to track inventory controls, cleaning logs, employee rosters, and more—creating a single source of truth for Monarch's operational endeavours.

“It would have been very hard to do the whole project in one go, so BTC's iterative approach was ideal. They were also very flexible, happy to pause and pick back up again when our time allowed.”

— **Stuart Hopkin, Managing Director**
Monarch Education Furniture

“If you're looking to build a web app, hire a team like BTC. Any idea we had, they grasped it right away so we could have a discussion around it. They understood our needs, giving us exactly what we wanted and more.”

— **Stuart Hopkin, Managing Director**
Monarch Education Furniture

Results:

Greater efficiency and smoother fulfilment

Monarch's robust web application provided powerful business insights by giving leaders a clear view of factory and fulfilment operations. Through a user-friendly dashboard and comprehensive data analytics, Monarch continues to stand out in their industry, offering their customers efficient fulfilment and exceptional service.



Looking to build your own web app?

Let's Talk