

Food services go hi-tech



STUART McEVROY

Richard Cohen has transformed the way PFD Food Services manages and processes data

CIO FILES

JENNIFER FORESHEW

RICHARD Cohen is driven by a vision to use technology to shape business better.

The self-confessed Melbourne Football Club "tragic" is chief information officer of food service distribution company PFD Food Services.

The company has more than 65 branches Australia-wide, with 550 trucks and about 2000 staff.

Each site operates its own warehouse and receives food products from various suppliers, which are then delivered to its customers, including pubs, clubs and restaurants.

Cohen joined PFD six years ago from General Mills, where he had an international information systems role. He has been in the

CIO role for about 15 months and is based in Melbourne. PFD has an IT budget of about \$10 million to \$12m a year.

"One of the biggest challenges that we have is a lot of our traditional customers historically haven't been as tech-savvy as the retail space," he says.

"So we have been playing a lot of catch-up in helping the direction of the industry."

PFD's core business system is MFG/Pro, which it has heavily modified to suit the food service environment. Over time, Cohen has acquired bolt-on applications such as SolveIT Software's demand planning and replenishment optimiser.

The company's sales team, comprising about 220 sales reps, also uses an application called Food Seller on an iPad.

"That allows the sales rep to engage the customer, obtain some real-time information as they are capturing that order and then submit that once again into MFG/Pro."

Telstra provides network and

telephony support and the data centre platform for PFD.

PFD is currently implementing the Kronos time management service at all of its branches and this will be completed in first quarter next year.

"We have been focusing on building an online presence... and we have seen some dramatic growth — pretty much double-digit growth — in our online space," Cohen says.

For hardware, PFD's main environment is around HP Itanium. It has a NetApp SAN (storage area networks) and a Hitachi Data Systems SAN environment.

"We are currently looking into radio frequency scanning to support our supply chain operation," Cohen says. "We have also been looking at GPS and the tracking of our trucks... so that we can get better efficiencies from route planning and delivery cycles."

Cohen says understanding how the company can leverage social media and change management are among his next challenges.