

Focused yet flexible

A retail product that focuses on only two main sectors may sound strange, but Core Tech has turned it into a strength, writes **Quinton O'Reilly**

For the majority of retail products, the focus is to cover as many sectors as possible while maintaining the flexibility that caters for each one. As management systems become more ubiquitous and businesses obtain more ways to manage the supply chain, casting the net wide makes sense for these providers.

For Core Tech, it takes a different approach with its

retail product. It focuses on two main sectors – agriculture as well as hardware and DIY – as there are needs from those two sectors which aren't replicated across other sectors.

According to Core Tech's general manager, Mairéad Cosgrave, 'being focused doesn't mean the product isn't flexible.'

"We don't do vanilla," she said. "Over the years, our retail offering expanded from agribusiness into wholesale and trading in the DIY area

because they share a lot of nuances regarding how they run their business and what their customers expect. What we ended up with is the perfect system for those specific and niche markets.

"Once we had an intuitive system, we looked for other areas within retail where that same premise, not the product, applied and retail and DIY was certainly where it applied".

While Core Tech's main focus is on ERP services for

agricultural business, part of the reason for the expansion into retail stems from how that

sector developed. As priorities changed and software gradually filled in more of the gaps

in businesses, the potential for businesses offering its own direct retail service grew.



The Core Tech team:
"We all learn from each other and share best practices"



Mairéad Cosgrave, general manager at Core Tech

Responding to these needs and changes was an opportunity Core Tech recognised and embraced.

"If you look at how agri-trading emerged itself as a standalone, significant retail sector within Irish retail, it's how all of the co-ops diversified and became innovative themselves to withstand various economic challenges," said Cosgrave.

"If you look at some of our largest agri-business customers, Dairygold has 40 stores, Glanbia has 38... multiple outlets across the country and retail form a significant part of their business, and we manage all of those for agri-retailing. A huge level of R&D comes directly from them, from their day-to-day using the system, and their own planning for their future requirements."

Its R&D centre, based in its headquarters in Mitchelstown, Co Cork, is one of Core Tech's greatest strengths. It being acquired by Cultura Technologies back in 2015 has opened up a number of doors for it regarding resources, collaboration with European and global companies. Its R&D centre is held in such high regard that it's preparing to launch its Mitchelstown base as the European Centre of R&D excellence for Cultura.

"We're part of an organisation where there are 333 companies, and we all learn from each other and share best practices," said Cos-

ahead in the game.

"That is a continuous and ever-evolving process, and rightly so. You want your latest version of your software to be the most available, the most robust, the most flexible because that's how we serve our customers best – which is probably why our reputation for investing in R&D is what it is," said Cosgrave.

"Without that investment in R&D, we would not be able to do what we do with and for our customers, because customer collaboration holds a huge key and it forms a very significant part of our R&D."

"We work with all of our customers in terms of what's their five and ten year plan, [and ask them] what are their expectations from our software for their customers? What does good look like? [Those are] the questions all the time. We engage with our key customers quarterly and annually for tech roadmaps [looking at] what's coming down the line, how are they creating growth, how do we help them create growth and sustain growth."

"That comes in on a regular basis, directly through customers and customer user groups, and it is essential to our claim that our software is not vanilla."

Alongside the further development of its R&D sector, the goal for Core Tech is to double the size of its retail business in the next three years. While it may seem obvious to say it, the focus for Core is to continue developing its product in two key areas.

"Retail full stop has been transforming over the last decade so online is old news, but cloud and mobile is where the future of retailing is," said Cosgrave. "The on-the-go element of mobile is absolutely essential, it allows competitive advantage and edges to emerge in what is a very competitive environment and we're seeing growth in that particular area."

"Where we're at now is integrated payments and integrated commerce with a significant bolt of mobile and cloud. The key to all of that, the part that makes it useful, sensible and a really good investment for businesses is the data analytics around it."

"To be able to predict customer habits, customer trends, and if they are seasonal... Our customers must have access to key data of their business in its entirety in order to help them grow, to forecast trends, to stay ahead of their competition and I would say it's non-negotiable."

"This is the stuff where software really does drive business, and it's true for software full stop, but nowhere more than in retail."



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grave. We're going to funnel all of that, from a European perspective, through Core Mitchelstown and that's really exciting."

Like all managed and retail services, improving the software, making tweaks and adding new features is a continuous process and one that ties in with its strengths in R&D. Working with its clients and adapting the product to help them and their customers are key to staying a step

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