With a particularly complex retail model, Vision Express were finding their existing forecasting solution and business processes not fit for purpose.

Vision Express is the leading retailer of designer and own-label glasses from over 340 locations supported by a delivery service to home for contact lens supply. Vision Express is part of Europe’s largest optical retailer and its immediate group continues to strengthen its position both in the UK and in Europe through its sister eye care brands Grand Optical, Solaris and Generale D’Optique.

The challenge
In 2005, the company decided to move to a direct sourcing model with the aim to improve the supply lines. This demanded a direct link to manufacturers, avoiding any prior central European consolidation of orders. This not only would reduce supply chain lead-times, it would also allow suppliers to be better aligned with the UK market’s needs in terms of product development. Their suppliers are working mainly to Make to Order (MTO) and have lead times of between 4 to 6 months, with sourcing both from Europe and the Far East.

Vision Express initially implemented a SAP forecasting solution, but found that the generic functionality did not fully satisfy the specific retail business needs for developing accurate forecasts quickly and easily.

The solution
After reviewing the market in some detail, the retailer turned to Exceedra, encouraged by a track record of implementing solutions in short time frames that delivered step changes in forecast accuracy. The key differentiator was its powerful yet flexible QFX forecasting engine, which manages all the varied types of demand profiles found in retail, and most importantly, for new products.

The solution was live and being used to drive the business within 4 weeks of agreeing contracts, including interfacing to the company’s SAP enterprise system. The ease and flexibility of the retail data model allowed the solution to be customised to their needs without high re-investment cost. A single Demand Planner is now able to manage all the distribution centre (DC) forecasts for all products, including glasses, contact lenses, sunglasses and accessories.

“Our unique selling point is having stock in-store to deliver there and then, often to have glazed-on prescription lenses for the customer within one hour, so we have to be very well stocked and have intelligent forecasts related to replenishment for our central warehouse,” says Martin Pearce McNeill, Demand Planning Manager at Vision Express.

Given that Vision Express carries around four thousand products in any store and has to be able to immediately fit the preferred frame with the right prescription lens, all within an hour, the retailer is dependent on an extremely tight and efficient supply chain. Information is fed directly from the company’s point-of-sale software, highlighting what’s sold throughout the day and what needs replacing.

Key benefits
- Long-term accurate forecasts shared with vendors and suppliers, leading to reduced lead time
- 24% increase in availability in-store over previous processes with fewer out of stocks, less reserve stock and reduced capital expenditure
- Cost effective and rapid implementation to support business change and improved processes
- Fully integration with existing AP enterprise system
- Ensured a consistent structured process for suppliers, while also providing better visibility of UK market needs
Vision Express

Why Exceedra
- Exceedra has many relevant references that have been through very similar journeys and were willing to talk about their experiences and benefits achieved.
- Exceedra provide a strong end to end solution rich in sub-processes functionality such as demand planning and forecasting. Alternative solutions often force companies to choose between single process functionality and the ability to support an integrated strategy; in turn falling short of delivering the full package.
- Exceedra boast a strong consultancy arm whose level of expertise has proved instrumental in delivering projects on time and on budget. The team has a very pragmatic approach and in all cases seeks to simplify both processes and IT landscape.

Rapid results
"With Exceedra we had a working database within just two hours, giving us the business solution we wanted," says McNeill. "It was amazing in its simplicity and efficiency and we had a workable solution that met our needs, and one that avoided the complexity - and cost - of other market ‘leading’ alternatives. The build simplicity should not detract from the rich functionality we gained over forecasting methods and models which suited our often complex needs."

Using Exceedra, Vision Express was able to create a hierarchy of best-selling products and analyse seasonal demand to ensure that it was ordering the right products for the right location, at the right time. With around 35,000 SKU’s (Stock Keeping Units), this proved a lot more reliable and quicker than previous manual processes, doing away with the need for several category managers effectively making their own ‘guess estimates’. Once the manufacturers receive the orders based on the demand forecasts for the year ahead, they take between three and five months to get into the stores. Exceedra made the process more accurate and helped some suppliers cut lead times. The end result is that “ninety out of a hundred are delivered as requested, a rate which is relatively high for optical retail”, says McNeill.

"The Exceedra solution was implemented on-time and under-budget and enabled a larger project to be controlled and supported without the complexity and delay we envisaged from other market alternatives," says David Hart, Supply Chain and IT director, Vision Express. "The solution has enabled us to improve our distribution availability by 24% to our stores and ultimately then onto our customers. The solution is now a key part of our landscape and has proven itself as best-of-breed in forecasting, developing continued intelligence and accuracy in our supply chain."

About Exceedra
Exceedra is a global solution, delivering Business Planning and Insight capabilities across commercial, financial and supply chain organisations in consumer goods companies. Our unique end to end solutions are focused on simplifying processes and providing insights for Integrated Business Planning, Trade Promotion Management & Optimisation, Customer Business Planning, Joint Business Planning and Sales & Operations Planning.

Our solutions allow the functional teams to achieve full process harmonisation and maximum efficiency. Built with the user in mind, Exceedra solutions provide a strong user experience that delivers high levels of user adoption, accelerating organisational transformation.

Our planning and insight capabilities allow our clients to visualise opportunities and risks more clearly, enabling timely decision-making that increases margins and revenues positively impacting business performance.

Exceedra customers which include Dyson, Bayer, Sony Music, Birds Eye, Weetabix, United Biscuits, Cioetta and Hain Celestial have deployed our solutions on the cloud or on-premise.

Since its inception in 2009, Exceedra has rapidly expanded with offices in the United Kingdom, United States and Australia. Exceedra was Editors’ Pick 2013 and 2014 for Consumer Goods Magazine.