Case study

From fragmented **to first place**

The Brief

Becoming number one in a mature market

After a series of acquisitions, a leading confectionery group set out to become number one in its market. However, growth was hampered by siloed operations, poor service levels and limited planning visibility.

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Becoming number one in a mature market

Oliver Wight's assessment revealed deep structural and behavioural gaps, from biased forecasts to disconnected commercial and operational planning. By aligning leadership around key priorities, and implementing sales and operations execution, and Integrated Business Planning, we helped unlock immediate performance gains and lasting transformation. Within two years, the company had vastly improved a number of key metrics and rose to the top of its retail channels. Here's how it happened.

THE CHALLENGE
FRAGMENTED TEAMS TO FAILING PLANS

Despite their aspirations, the leadership team quickly ran into familiar frustrations, facing significant internal and external challenges:

- A saturated market with limited growth opportunities
- Fragmented operations following mergers
- Inefficiencies in supply chain management and inventory control
- Poor service levels, including low order fill rates and retailer penalties
- Lack of visibility across planning horizons and insufficient integration between marketing, sales and operations
- Underperformance in margin delivery and overinvestment in working capital

Finance leaders worried about missed targets and high working capital. Supply chain leaders felt stuck, juggling excess stock with low service levels. Sales & Marketing leaders lacked confidence in plans and visibility.

Everyone was firefighting.
Trust was fraying.

It was clear: they had scale, but not synergy. To grow, they needed integration - not just of systems, but of people, plans and purpose.

Our approach

Strategic assessment and executive alignment

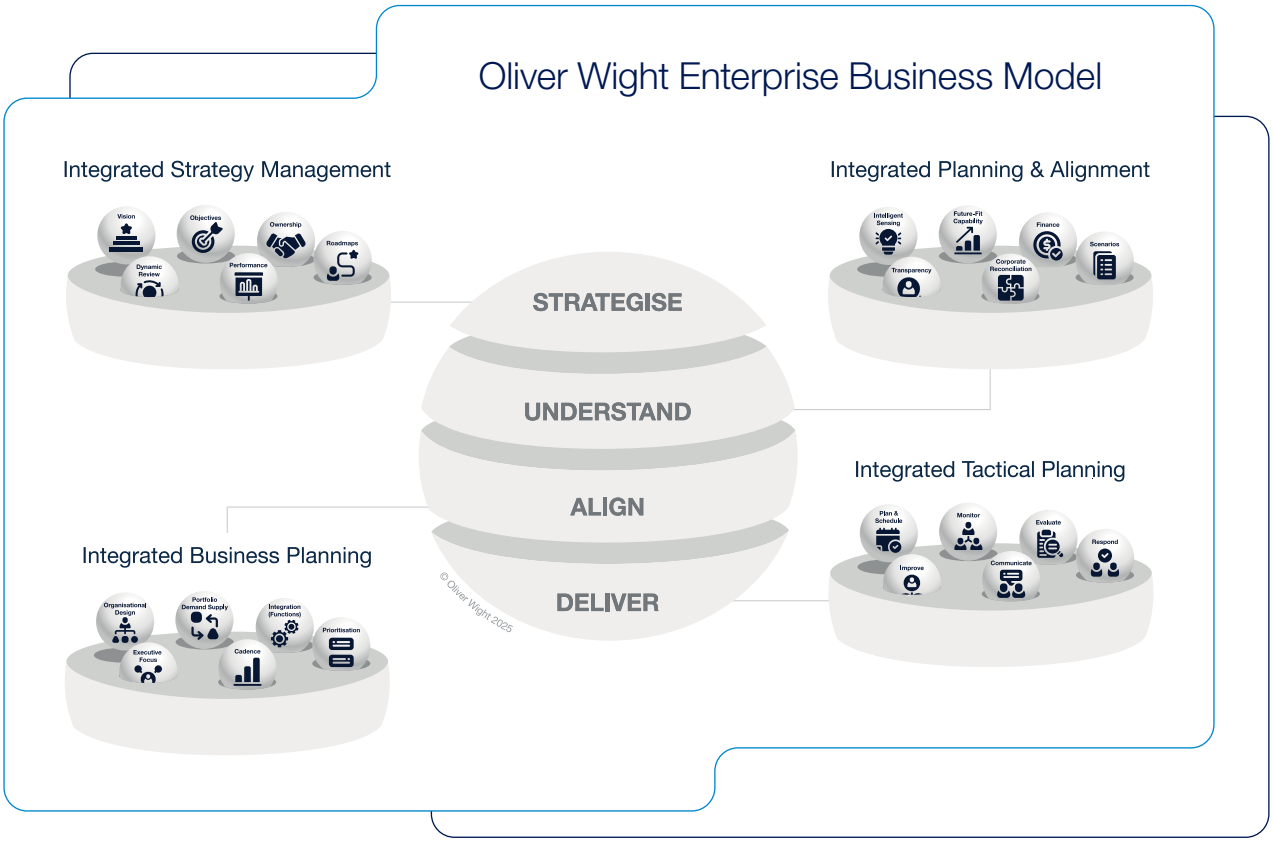
Having previously worked with Oliver Wight consultants across its acquisitions, the client turned to us to lead the next phase of change. Our engagement began with a comprehensive assessment using the Oliver Wight Enterprise Business Model framework.

We conducted qualitative and quantitative diagnostics across end-to-end functions, including **demand planning, portfolio management, manufacturing, supply chain, marketing and finance.**

This assessment also included site visits and interviews across markets and business units to identify capability gaps, structural inefficiencies and performance shortfalls.

One of the first steps was aligning the executive team on what we term their ‘must-wins’. These critical strategic priorities became the foundation for our improvement roadmap. We also introduced the concept of ‘the point of commitment’, helping senior leaders recognise that achieving their goals would require behavioural and structural change.

This wasn’t just strategic clarity, it was emotional clarity. For many leaders, this was the first time they’d felt confident their peers were pulling in the same direction.



Key findings

Operational silos, lost margin and missed opportunities

The diagnostic uncovered a range of pressing issues undermining performance. Marketing, in particular, was not contributing to the long-range demand plan, creating disconnects between promotional planning and production capacity.

The business lacked a unified, forward-looking view of its operational and commercial plans, which was essential for achieving competitive advantage.

Issues included

- Order fill rates averaged just 93%, triggering penalties from retailers due to poor on-shelf availability and freshness
- Significant levels of write-offs due to short shelf life, with product being redistributed at discount due to expiry risks
- Planning horizons were too short to enable effective investment and capacity decisions
- Disconnects between functional teams resulted in promotional activity being planned against products that could not be fulfilled
- The supply chain was carrying excess inventory, yet still experiencing capacity shortfalls during peak demand
- Forecast bias and inaccuracies were concealed within a traditional budgeting process, contributing to poor decision-making

And many of these issues were personal and emotional as well as operational. Marketing leaders felt disempowered. Supply chain leads felt blamed for problems beyond their control. Finance was under pressure to explain variances that they couldn't predict.

These problems were connected.
And that meant the solutions had to be too.

The journey
From assessment to change

With clarity on the challenges, the next phase focused on implementation. The change journey was structured into a series of sprints, designed to build momentum while enabling sustainable change.

By sequencing the work, we gave leaders a sense of momentum. The early wins were not only performance improvements but acted as morale boosters as well. Teams began to believe change was possible. And crucially, they saw it was happening with them, not to them.

We categorised the work into three streams:

01
Quick wins
Tactical improvements achievable within 90 days, such as adjustments to service processes and basic demand planning refinements

02
Process redesign sprints
Multi-month improvement projects focusing on structural change

03
Long-term transformation
A programme to establish Integrated Business Planning (IBP) as the new business rhythm

Implementation

To drive structural and behavioural change, we introduced a series of integrated planning solutions, each one solving a real, human problem identified in the assessment:

- **Integrated Tactical Planning (ITP)**
  We developed a tactical planning layer focused on short-term execution. This helped the business better manage promotional uplifts, align sales and portfolio with operations and increase agility.
- **Demand Planning**
  We developed and improved the demand planning process to ensure full integration of all sales, marketing and portfolio plans over the 36-month horizon.
- **Integrated Business Planning (IBP)**
  Once visibility and plan quality had improved, we introduced IBP to provide an end-to-end view from strategy to execution. This replaced the traditional budgeting process with a dynamic, rolling horizon planning process
- **Portfolio planning integration**
  Marketing teams were engaged to contribute to longer-term planning horizons, enabling better-informed demand plans that reflected upcoming campaigns and new product development.
- **Cross-functional planning capabilities**
  We established standard processes, governance structures and accountability across functions to break down silos and support sustained change.

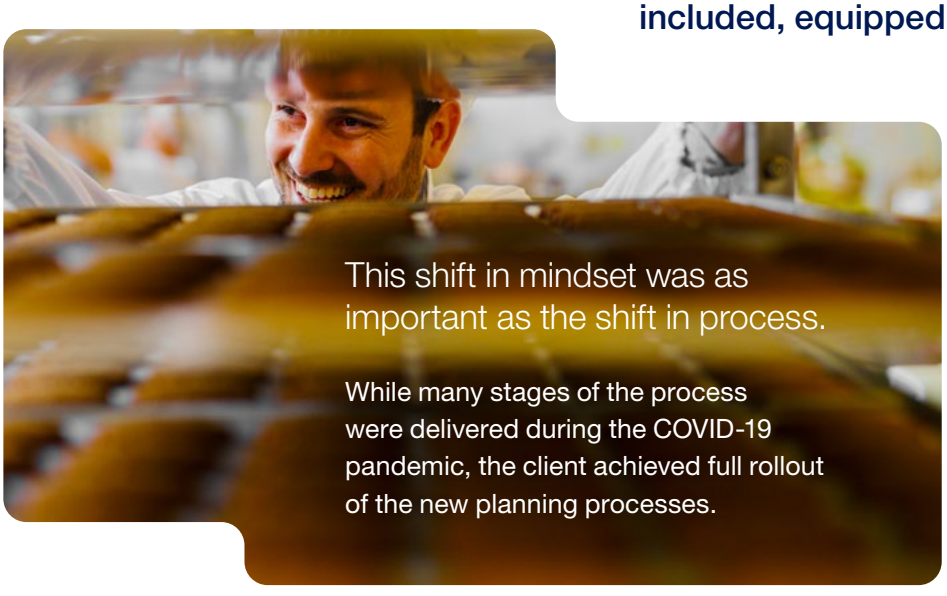
Leaders felt less isolated.
Planning became a shared responsibility, not a battleground.

Workshops and coaching
Building capability from the inside out

To ensure knowledge transfer and internal capability building, we delivered a programme of workshops and coaching sessions:

- **Leadership alignment workshop**
  To drive executive commitment and shared understanding of the behavioural change required
- **Five education sessions**
  To embed core concepts and methodologies across key teams
- **Seven design sprints**
  Each sprint was focused on co-creating new ways of working, covering demand planning, portfolio integration, supply chain planning and IBP
- **Ongoing coaching**
  Provided to senior leaders and functional teams to reinforce adoption and ensure sustained performance improvements

These sessions rehumanised change.
Teams didn't feel trained, they felt included, equipped and encouraged.



Results and benefits
Becoming number one

Soon after the programme began, the business had achieved its ambition of becoming the number one confectioner in its target channels.

Key outcomes included:

- **Market leadership** – Achieved the top position in multiple retail channels across Europe
- **Operational efficiency** – Improved by 10%, creating free capacity and enabling more agile responses to demand
- **On-time, in-full performance** – Reached up to 100% by product line, with an average of 98%+
- **Inventory reduction** – Inventory was reduced by 20%, freeing up working capital and improving cash flow
- **Obsolete stock** – SLOB (slow-moving and obsolete stock) reduced by over 90%
- **Margin improvement** – Gross margin increased by over 1%, surpassing industry benchmarks
- **Forecast bias** – Brought within ±2%, enabling more accurate financial planning
- **Employee morale** – Staff turnover decreased, morale improved and cross-functional collaboration increased
- **Marketing ROI** – Increased significantly due to improved planning and alignment
- **Finance efficiency** – Variance analysis workload reduced thanks to more predictable outcomes and better planning accuracy

This wasn't just about being better. It was about being together. A business once marked by fragmentation was now united by shared goals, clearer plans and deeper trust.

This case study exemplifies how true change is personal as well as technical. Oliver Wight helped this business evolve from a fragmented group of legacy brands into a confident, agile and integrated market leader by connecting strategy with systems and systems with people.

By embedding Integrated Tactical Planning and Integrated Business Planning - underpinned by our Enterprise Business Model - we enabled our client to align people, processes and planning horizons around a shared vision. The result was not only operational excellence but strategic leadership in a competitive, mature market.

Their journey reflects what so many business leaders are striving for: not just better performance, but greater clarity, stronger alignment and a renewed sense of purpose.

When every part of the organisation - from planning to people to priorities - moves in unison, leadership isn't just possible, **it's inevitable.**

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