








Stokes Seeds Modernises Multi-Year Forecasting While Catching Customer Shifts in Real Time with Business Central Insights

Executive Summary

Stokes Seeds, one of the largest vegetable seed distributors in Canada and Eastern United States, manages roughly 3,000 SKUs across multiple package sizes, serving commercial growers, market farmers, and home gardeners across Canada and the United States. Unlike most inventory businesses, seed purchasing decisions are made one, two, or even three years in advance, while customer preferences can shift dramatically from one season to the next.

By implementing Business Central Insights (BCI), Stokes replaced spreadsheet-driven analysis and decades of institutional knowledge with real-time, accessible reporting. Today, buyers and sales teams can spot shifting customer behaviour, surface overdue supplier orders, and act on inventory trends without waiting for someone else to pull the numbers.

Today, BCI provides:

-  Real-time visibility into sales, purchasing, and inventory trends
-  Faster, more accurate multi-year data-driven supplier forecasting
-  Improved identification of shifting customer buying behaviour
-  Better inventory management and reduced waste
-  Faster decision-making across purchasing and sales teams

BCI has become a central operational tool helping Stokes Seeds modernise decision-making while supporting future growth and expansion across North America.

The Challenge

As Stokes Seeds expanded its operations across Canada and the U.S., operational complexity increased significantly.

The business manages:

- Roughly 3,000 SKUs across multiple product categories
- Additional complexity from multiple package sizes
- Seasonal demand fluctuations
- Long-term supplier forecasting cycles
- Constantly changing customer buying patterns

Unlike traditional inventory businesses, seed purchasing requires forecasting years in advance while adapting quickly to shifting customer preferences and evolving market conditions.

"It's a live product. We're making purchasing decisions one, two, even three years out."

Scott Plugers,
Chief Financial and Operations Officer, Stokes Seeds



Historically, much of the business relied on:

- Manual spreadsheet analysis
- Institutional knowledge held by long-serving employees
- Time-consuming data extraction
- Limited visibility into customer purchasing shifts
- Reactive rather than proactive decision-making

The lack of centralised, digestible insights created operational challenges across purchasing, forecasting, inventory management, and sales.

"We had no tools to really understand what makes the business tick."

Customer buying behaviour could shift rapidly without warning, creating purchasing and inventory risks.

"One year a customer buys one variety, the next year they switch completely. If you don't see it quickly, you're buying the wrong inventory."

At the same time, the business needed a way to make operational insights accessible to non-technical users across purchasing and sales teams.

"You have to make it simple for people to adopt. This is key to getting team buy-in."

Why Business Central Insights (BCI)

Stokes Seeds knew it needed a solution that could surface Business Central data in a way that was practical, actionable, and easy to understand.

The business initially explored building internal reporting tools, but quickly ran into limitations.

Internal reports:

- Required constant manual manipulation
- Delivered static snapshots rather than actionable insights
- Struggled to combine purchasing, sales, and inventory data effectively
- Consumed valuable operational time

"We could create reports, but they still required constant manipulation."

Scott Plugers, Chief Financial and Operations Officer, Stokes Seeds

After being introduced to BCI through its Microsoft implementation partner, the Stokes Seeds team quickly recognised the fit.

BCI provided:

- Purpose-built Business Central reporting
- Clear visualisation of purchasing, inventory, and customer trends
- Faster access to operational insights
- Easy drill-down into live business data
- Flexible reporting for different teams and users



"You could see right away that it was a fit."

For Stokes Seeds, the ability to surface complex operational data in a digestible format became a major differentiator.



"Our IT team is amazed at how BCI surfaces and presents all this information so simply."

Implementation & Early Value

Stokes Seeds took a phased approach to implementation to ensure strong user adoption across the organisation.

Initially, BCI was rolled out to leadership and key operational users before expanding access to sales and purchasing teams.

Rather than overwhelming users with large volumes of reporting, the business focused on surfacing the most important operational dashboards first.

"We gave teams the five or six reports that mattered most so they could focus on what's important."

Scott Plugers, Chief Financial and Operations Officer, Stokes Seeds



The impact was immediate.

Purchasing teams gained instant visibility into:

- Short inventory positions
- Supplier delays
- Customer purchasing shifts
- Seasonal buying patterns
- Slow-moving inventory

Sales teams gained access to:

- Customer margin analysis
- Historical buying trends
- Product movement patterns
- Real-time sales insights

BCI also surfaced operational issues that previously went unnoticed.



"We found overdue supplier purchase orders that had completely fallen through the cracks."

The business quickly realised the operational value of faster, data-driven visibility.



"When people saw how quickly they could get answers, adoption happened naturally."

Tangible Results

With BCI in place, Stokes Seeds significantly improved operational visibility, forecasting accuracy, and decision-making speed.



Faster Forecasting & Purchasing



- 1 day of supplier forecasting and purchasing analysis time saved across 3 team members
- 1 to 3 year supplier forecasting cycles supported by clearer purchasing data
- 1 day faster customer buying shift detection
- Reduced manual reporting effort

“The time savings around supplier forecasting are massive.”

Scott Plugers, Chief Financial and Operations Officer, Stokes Seeds

Better Inventory Visibility



- 100+ slow-moving products identified or recovered
- Improved inventory utilisation
- Reduced waste from unsold products
- Ability to turn excess inventory into ecommerce sales
- 3,000 SKUs managed with clearer inventory, sales, and purchasing visibility

“BCI helped us identify products we could sell instead of throwing away.”

Smarter Operational Decision-Making



- 5+ overdue supplier POs surfaced
- 80% faster access to the answers teams previously had to pull manually
- Faster identification of overdue supplier purchase orders
- Better visibility into seasonal buying trends
- Real-time operational insights across teams
- More targeted conversations between purchasing and sales

"We can now ask much more precise questions because we finally have the data."



Improved User Adoption



- 10+ users using BCI across leadership, purchasing, sales, and operations
- 6 key dashboards/reports adopted by non-technical users
- Simplified dashboards improved accessibility
- Greater use of data across non-technical teams
- Buyers empowered to make decisions independently

"I want staff to have the information themselves so they can make decisions without relying on others."



Deeper Business Impact

Beyond efficiency gains, BCI has fundamentally changed how Stokes Seeds manages and operates the business.

Turning Data into Action



Previously, teams spent large amounts of time manually working through spreadsheets hoping to identify problems or opportunities.

BCI changed that dynamic entirely.

"Instead of getting lost in spreadsheets, we now know exactly where to focus our attention every day."

Scott Plugers, Chief Financial and Operations Officer, Stokes Seeds

The business can now proactively respond to:

- Changing customer buying habits
- New product trends
- Seasonal demand shifts
- Supplier forecasting requirements
- Inventory risks

Supporting a Fast-Moving Market



The vegetable seed industry is far more dynamic than many realise.

Customers frequently shift varieties based on:

- Consumer buying trends
- Retailer preferences
- Crop performance
- Disease resistance
- New product innovations

BCI enables Stokes Seeds to react faster to these market changes.

"Customers are constantly chasing the next best thing."

Preserving Institutional Knowledge



Historically, critical business knowledge often lived in the heads of long-serving employees.

BCI is helping centralise operational intelligence and reduce reliance on tribal knowledge.

"You can't transition decades of knowledge through spreadsheets alone."

Partnership & Continuous Improvement

A major differentiator for Stokes Seeds has been the ongoing partnership with the eKnowtion and BCI teams.

Rather than implementing a static reporting platform, BCI continues evolving alongside the business.

Key benefits include:

- Ongoing support and collaboration
- Continuous product improvements
- Flexible reporting enhancements
- Support for evolving operational requirements
- Expansion alongside future business growth

"I'm a huge advocate for it. It's been tremendous for us."

Scott Plugers, Chief Financial and Operations Officer, Stokes Seeds

The partnership is also playing a critical role in Stokes Seeds' upcoming U.S. Business Central rollout.






The Canadian business has already adopted BCI extensively, while the U.S. operation is scheduled to transition to Business Central and BCI later this year.

"I can't wait for the U.S. team to have these same tools."

What's Next

With a stronger reporting and operational foundation in place, Stokes Seeds is focused on expanding the use of BCI across additional business areas.

Future priorities include:

-  Expanding BCI adoption across U.S. operations
-  Further improving supplier forecasting
-  Enhancing ecommerce inventory management
-  Increasing buyer and purchasing team adoption
-  Driving more proactive inventory planning

As the business continues growing across North America, BCI will remain central to helping Stokes Seeds respond faster to changing market conditions and make smarter operational decisions.

"BCI gives us clear directions every day. It tells us where to focus, where to act, and where we can create value fastest."

**Scott Plugers,
Chief Financial and Operations Officer, Stokes Seeds**

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