advanced

Retail

How Advanced Data
Automation increased
Arco's digital orders
by over 500%

arco®
Experts in Safety

Client
Arco

Industry
Retail

Project
Developing digital capabilities
to meet growing sales

Introduction

Faced with increasing customer demand, safety equipment supplier Arco needed to keep its digital technologies up to date and upskill its team. Discover how Advanced Data Automation transformed Arco's online sales to support rapid growth, in the company's own words.

Building demands and pressure

Arco is the UK's leading supplier of safety equipment, workwear and maintenance supplies. We're a family-run business with four generations of safety expertise. Today, we employ around 1,700 employees nationwide.

Our goal is to keep people safe at work. In the early 2010s, we started to do this on a greater scale than ever before as our customer base continued to expand. We were receiving increasing numbers of orders across a range of channels, including our website, our electronic data interchange (EDI) channel, via telephone and email – in addition to our retail outlets.
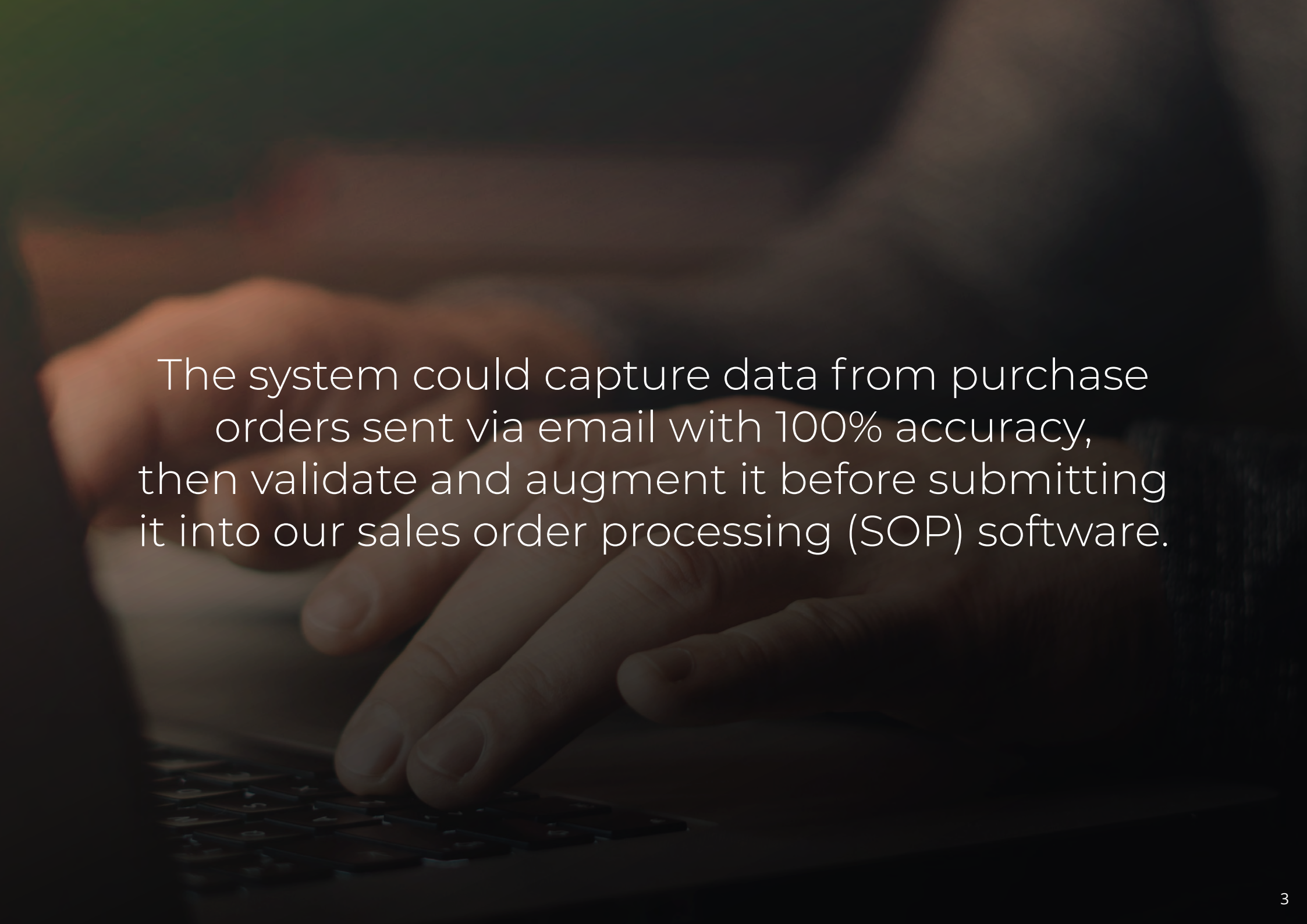
The pressure on our digital team increased when they were given some aggressive sales forecasts in 2012. Although we already had a strong digital offering in place thanks to our website and EDI connection, these facilities had their limitations. Only around one in every 50 orders came through our EDI channel, and many customers couldn't establish a true EDI connection. In addition, our website required manual entry, which reduced customer adoption. Unless we could make our digital services more flexible and accessible, there was a risk that we couldn't keep up with customer demand and would lose trade as a result.

Recognising that boosting digital trading would be crucial for success in a competitive market, we decided to improve our customer experience for order submissions. Although the obvious option was to hire extra staff for our customer service team, we were concerned that it would prove inefficient over the long term, limiting order processing to UK working hours and slowing processing times depending on staff productivity.
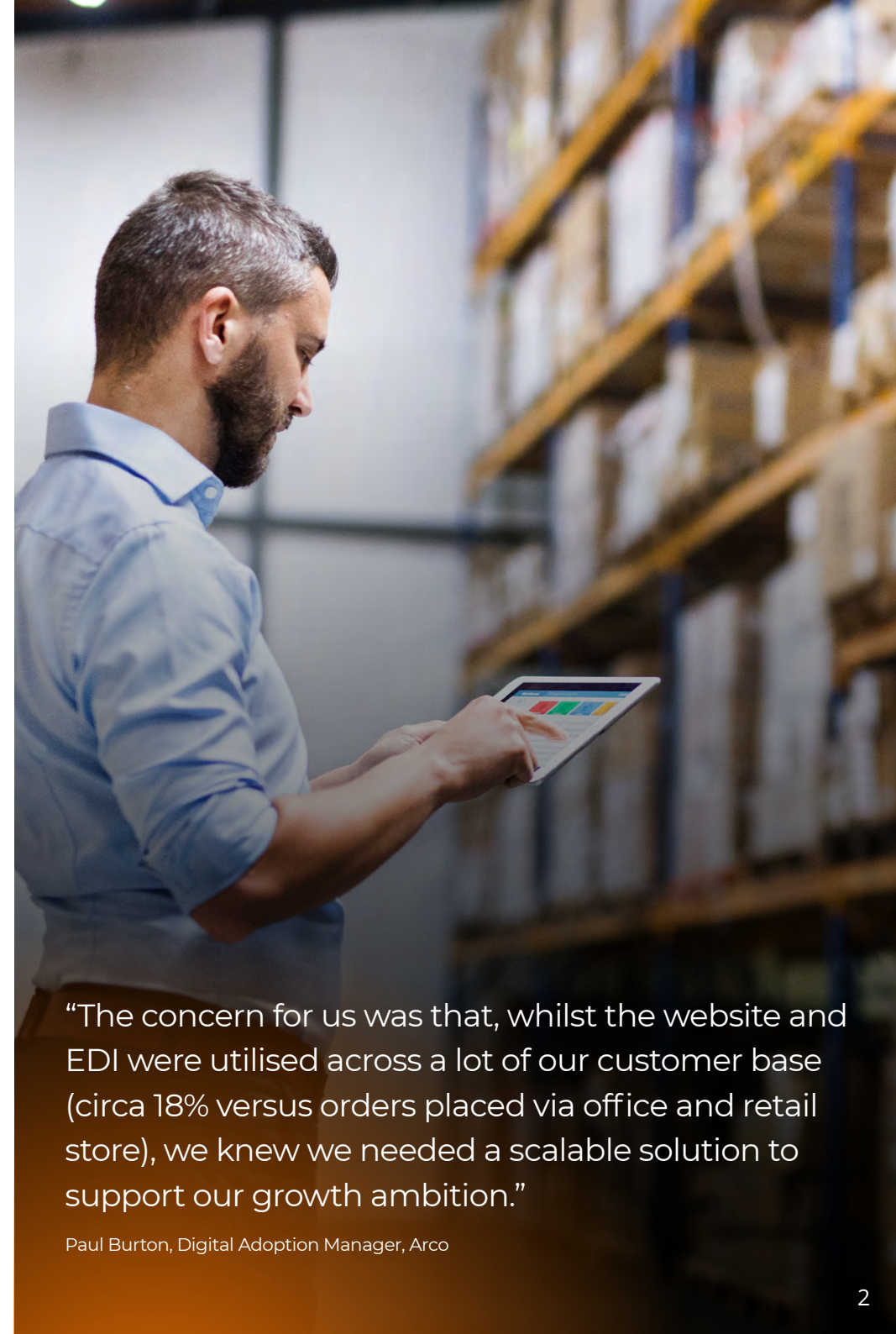
"The concern for us was that, whilst the website and EDI were utilised across a lot of our customer base (circa 18% versus orders placed via office and retail store), we knew we needed a scalable solution to support our growth ambition."

Paul Burton, Digital Adoption Manager, Arco

The system could capture data from purchase orders sent via email with 100% accuracy, then validate and augment it before submitting it into our sales order processing (SOP) software.

Finding a scalable solution

Searching for more effective solutions, our digital team discovered the Advanced Data Automation solution for Orders, which delivers straight-through, no-touch order processing. The system could capture data from purchase orders sent via email with 100% accuracy, then validate and augment it before submitting it into our sales order processing (SOP) software.

The team realised that Advanced Data Automation could handle a large amount of our existing customer orders, as well as opening the door for more customers to begin using digital ordering submissions. All they'd have to do was send us an email with a PDF generated by their procure-to-pay software – there wouldn't be any duplicate processes or a costly and time-consuming set-up.
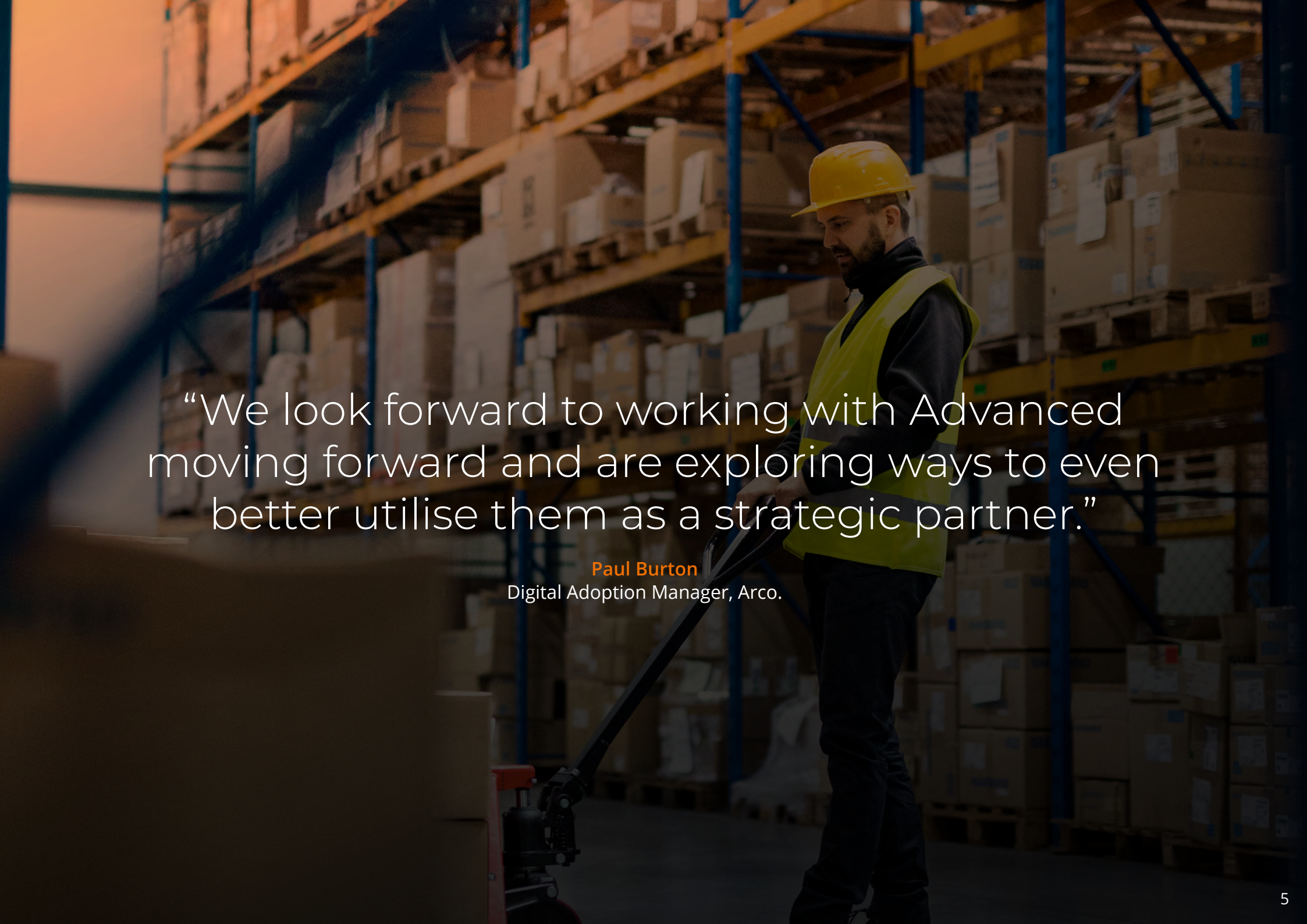
Although our digital team was confident that Advanced Data Automation's capabilities would make a huge difference to our business, our sales and service teams had some concerns about moving to a new system. Automation technology would change the relationship between us and our customers, which had traditionally been owned by our sales and service colleagues, and they feared this would lead to their roles becoming less important. Furthermore, they had questions about the technology itself: could implementation disrupt our current systems and cause business interruption? And if the technology failed later down the line, would customer orders be processed accurately and quickly – or at all?

Our e-business specialists reassured our sales and service teams that any disruption to ongoing processes during the implementation would be minimal, as Advanced would onboard customers themselves.
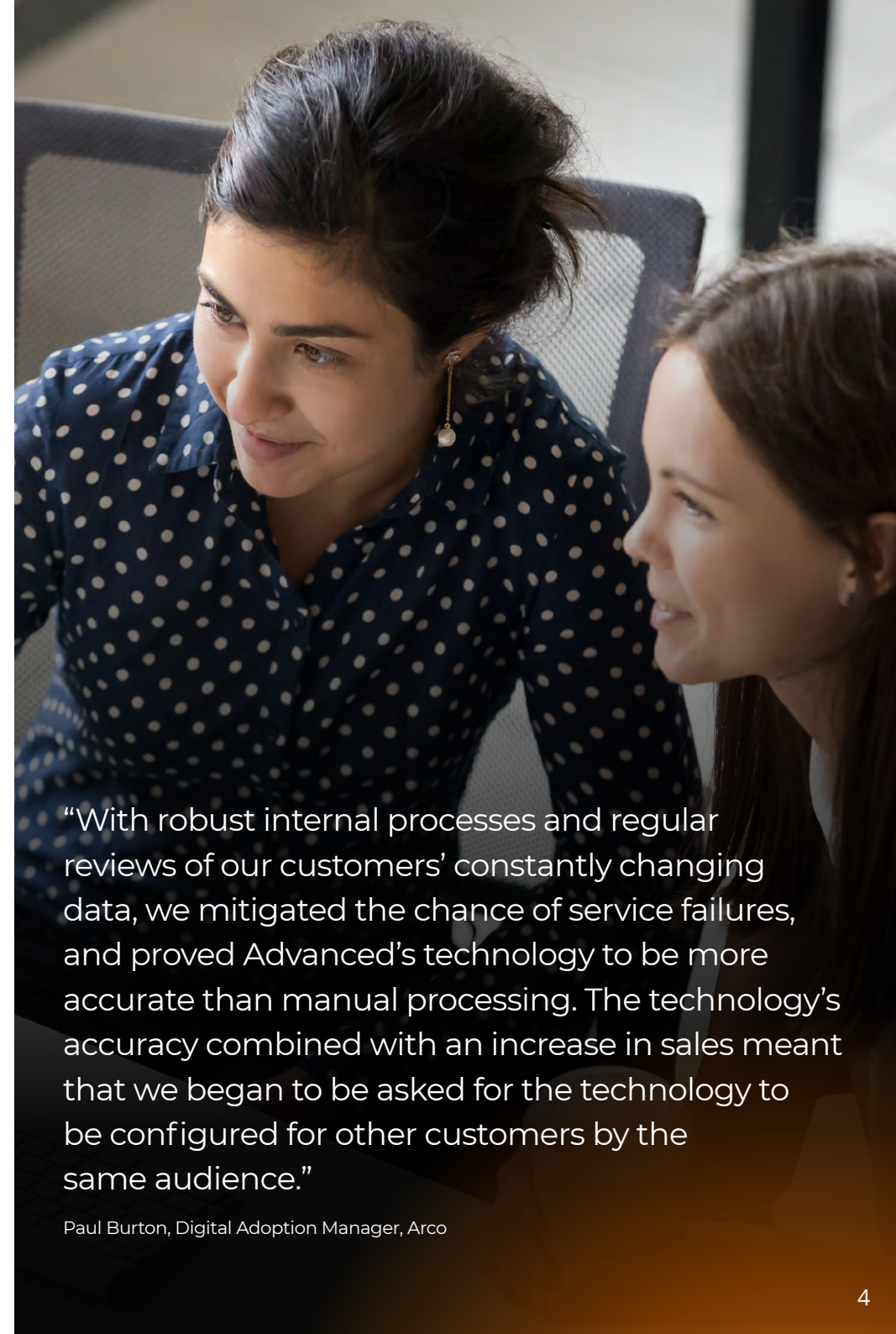
"With robust internal processes and regular reviews of our customers' constantly changing data, we mitigated the chance of service failures, and proved Advanced's technology to be more accurate than manual processing. The technology's accuracy combined with an increase in sales meant that we began to be asked for the technology to be configured for other customers by the same audience."

Paul Burton, Digital Adoption Manager, Arco

"We look forward to working with Advanced moving forward and are exploring ways to even better utilise them as a strategic partner."

Paul Burton
Digital Adoption Manager, Arco.

A game-changing solution

With everyone at Arco on board with the change, we transitioned to Advanced Data Automation. Thanks to Advanced's managed service support, the implementation went smoothly as Advanced Data Automation seamlessly integrated with our own systems.

As we'd hoped, Advanced Data Automation significantly boosted the speed and flexibility of our digital order processing channels. We have multiplied our sales and grown our business, all while maintaining control over our costs and resources.

Paul explains:

"This proved to be a real game-changer for us, and we quickly began to reduce the order processing burden from our customer service teams and within five years we had grown our digital channels from less than 1 in 50 orders to processing 1 in 8."

Paul Burton, Digital Adoption Manager, Arco

And that's not all. Advanced has helped to resolve additional EDI issues by providing a valuable link to allow our SOP system to connect despite technical security protocols, solutions and languages. The Advanced team has acted as our middleware translation service, converting the documents we send and receive into the languages and formats we and our customers can accept. Advanced Data Automation has also helped us to bill our customers by producing outbound invoices in whichever digital format they require, including cXML, edifact or idoc.

As the years have gone by, our strategic partnership has continued to deliver results. With Advanced's support, we were able to quickly bring our more centralised services team to successful realisation in 2018. We've also upskilled our e-business specialists and achieved phenomenal business growth.

We're delighted with everything Advanced has helped us to achieve and hope to continue our collaboration well into the future. Paul sums it up when he says: "We look forward to working with Advanced moving forward and are exploring ways to even better utilise them as a strategic partner."

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We would love to hear from you

We hope this was a useful insight into how Acro use Advanced Data Automation to streamline their operations and increase digital orders. If you would like to find out more about how Advanced Data Automation can help your business and ensure you are ready to meet the challenges of the future, get in touch with us today.

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