Epicor Helps Plastics Manufacturer Improve Customer Experience and Grow the Business

Company Facts

- Location: United Kingdom
- Industry: Manufacturing
- Web site: www.rutlandplastics.co.uk

Success Highlights

Challenges and Opportunities
- Legacy MRP system could no longer support the growing business
- Previous systems were not integrated and data was kept in too many different Microsoft® Excel® spreadsheets
- One of the main competitive differentiators is customer service

Solution
- Epicor ERP

Benefits
- Improved stock management resulting in holding reduced levels of stock
- Better view of customer demand leading to improved business planning
- Exact visibility of costings, enabling a shift in focus on improving operations, a reduction in overall costs, and an increase in efficiency
- Improved customer service

Rutland Plastics is a privately owned custom moulder of high quality bespoke products for a wide variety of industries. Founded in 1956, the company originally manufactured its own range of plastic products, from artificial flowers to children's toys. Cheap imports led to Rutland Plastics diversifying and turnover exceeded £1 million for the first time in 1977, coinciding with the awarding of a British Gas contract for pipe fittings.

Demand for the custom moulding of large plastic products led to an investment in increasingly bigger moulding machines. The company purchased a 1250 tonne machine in 1990 and added a 1700 tonne machine in 2004. A further 1700 tonne machine was introduced in 2011. Turnover is now in the region of £9 million and the company employs in excess of 100 people.

In 1989 the company was awarded the BS5750/ISO9002 (now ISO9001:2000) accreditation, and they added Investors in People in 1999. With concern for the environment increasing in importance, the company was awarded the environmental management standard ISO14001 in 2008 and medical standard ISO13485 in 2013.

Facing challenges that posed a risk to the business

"We rely on our customers to sell the products we make and it's important to us to appeal to those customers," says Steve Ayre, IT manager for Rutland Plastics. "Because we're a growing business we found ourselves facing some

challenges that hindered us from servicing our customers as well as we wanted. For example, our larger, 1700 tonne machines were not as busy as the smaller machines. The customers specify which materials we have to use so we have very little control over prices for material, because we don't buy high volumes of material, it leads to reduced buying power and prices are almost dictated to us. Coupled with the fact that our MRP system was starting to get old and we found ourselves with a growing number of Excel spreadsheets, we realised that we needed to make some changes in order to stay competitive."

At the time the company used two systems, one for finance and the other—developed in the mid-90s—to meet their specific manufacturing needs.

"Our existing systems were making it very difficult to get the reports and management information that we needed to run the business, and no development had taken place on our manufacturing software for about 15 years," says Ayre. "We reviewed a total of ten systems when we were selecting the replacement, and most required additional third party software to meet the needs of our industry. Epicor had everything we needed built in, and we could see that it was more straightforward than the other solutions to implement. Ultimately we chose Epicor because we liked the flexibility of the product and that gave us the confidence that the solution would enable us to do what we needed it to do."

The system that Rutland Plastics had in use was no longer supported; it had been developed internally and was heavily industry focused.

"If we hadn't switched systems it would have become a risk to the business," says Ayre. "Because our old system was not supported, if issues had arisen those could have had a detrimental effect on the business. An ERP system helps you control your business and you can't afford to take risks. With Epicor in place this element of risk has disappeared."

Building ERP knowledge in-house

Ayre comments about the implementation period, "After selecting Epicor we decided to do quite a lot of the implementation ourselves. It means that we now can write dashboards and develop add-ons ourselves as and when we need them. It also means that we have retained a lot of knowledge about the system in-house. So when the initial implementation project finished we could easily move on and change processes or do things differently when the business

demands a change. It also means that we can tweak reports instantly and turn around changes quickly. This works very well for us because we have a number of people that are able to work with the system on a regular basis."

Building knowledge about their ERP system in-house is something that Rutland Plastics has found extremely useful. "If I was to give anyone a tip about implementing a new ERP system," says Ayre, "it would be to try and keep as much knowledge as possible in-house by including staff members on the project team. Because we have such a good team in place now they have been able to do more of the technical aspects of the solution, write dashboards, BAQs, etc. which has been very useful. It's all so easy to think that the best way is to buy in the expertise but that could be a mistake in the long term."

Meeting standards for accreditations

Because of having system expertise in-house they have been able to write user-defined dashboards as well as a basic quality check system. "This system basically looks at what quality checks each part needs to go through and what corrective actions that may need to take place. It is an important part of our ISO accreditation," says Ayre.

The company was also recently awarded the ISO13485 medical standard for manufacturing medical parts and Epicor supports this process through its traceability features. Ayre explains, "We also make parts for safety critical applications such as gas pipe fittings, and those batches of fittings must be traceable in case of problems and recalls."

Improving company-wide efficiency

With Epicor in place Rutland Plastics can now easily send order acknowledgements, delivery notes and invoices to their relevant destinations automatically using Altec doc-link, an integrated document management system designed to manage all imaging, document management, workflow and routing needs. "This means that we have been able to drastically cut the number of invoices we send out in the post, which has led to obvious administrative benefits," says Ayre. "For example, we used to print multi-layered purchase orders to track orders, it was an entirely paper-based process that's now completely gone; it's all taken care of by the system. This has enabled our buyers to focus their efforts on chasing orders rather than shuffling paper! It's not only given us time savings but it also means that we can work proactively instead of having to react to pieces of paper all the time."

Dropping stock levels and servicing customers better

One of the biggest benefits, however, of Rutland Plastics running Epicor is stock management. "Our stock levels have dropped significantly," says Ayre. "Because we have full visibility of customer demand and customer orders we have been able to reduce stock and improve service reliability. We now know exactly what's happening to orders throughout the business, and we can therefore plan accordingly. With Epicor we have full visibility of exactly how much a job or a part is costing us. This means that we can focus on improving things like scrap rate, or how to better manage problem products. It helps us to cut costs and be more efficient overall."

Epicor has certainly inspired Rutland Plastics to service customers better. Ayre explains, "We are now, for example, able to write dashboards that our customer facing staff can use to access information and have data available at their fingertips when they need it. This means that they can answer all questions from customers quickly and efficiently. It also means that they can plan a job there and then, while the customer waits, and give them more accurate lead times than before. The system tells us exactly what's possible and then our staff can use that information to gauge realistic timescales. With the new reports we can customise the information that needs to be on specific orders, we can generate customer-specific reports, and we can more easily plan and prioritise orders."

The new dashboards and reports help Rutland Plastics to better review sales and stock levels, contributing to the improvements within the stock management processes. "We get an instant view of where we're at, at any given specific point in time, and we can look ahead and predict where the business is heading,"

says Ayre. "Before Epicor this was very difficult. We had to work from various print-outs but we can now get a quick graphical view of sales split per customer. In our type of business we can't see very far ahead, it's quite short term as we rely on customers to sell the products we make , but that means it's vital for us to be able to make quick changes. If a customer decides to change their priorities we often have to change our processes immediately to accommodate them. It means that we use planning and scheduling in Epicor a lot and improving our customer experience is very important."

Measuring up and building a foundation for the future

The original goal for Rutland Plastics was simply to just replace their legacy MRP system but with Epicor in place they have received a far stronger platform to improve their business well into the future. "Epicor measures up very well against our expectations," comments Ayres. "The system includes all the industry specific functionality we need and it's much easier to work with data, using user-defined tables and screens. It's great to know that the system can continue to evolve as the business changes and we are already starting to add on pieces, such as various other systems that were kept separate, to integrate our business processes and streamline our usage even further."

The flexibility that is found in Epicor was an important criterion from the start that has also continued to live up to its expectations. Ayre explains, "We really like the flexibility of Epicor. We can do our own reports and even add on new functionality as and when we need it. For example, we recently developed a small piece of functionality for product batch approval. We often have to send our customers a first off sample for testing before the batch is approved. But it means

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Steve Ayre, IT Manager | Rutland Plastics

that we need to track these samples. So we've build a small piece of functionality that fires off an email to the customer once the sample has been sent out to find out if they received it and how they got on with the testing. Previously we had to rely on people's memories to send emails and chase up samples. Automating processes like these has helped us achieve true savings and it cuts the risk of human errors, helping us to focus on activities that really matters."

Rutland Plastics has even been able to go one step further by the addition of a new prototyping process. Ayre concludes,

"Since going live with Epicor we have started offering 3D rapid prototyping both to our existing customers and to also attract new customers. It means that we can produce samples and prototypes quicker and more accurately. It also means that we waste less on costly tooling changes, again making our processes more streamlined and helping us service our customers and do our job better. Epicor has been able to cope with this additional service that wasn't considered as part of the original system requirements."

About Epicor

Epicor Software Corporation drives business growth. We provide flexible, industry-specific software that is designed around the needs of our manufacturing, distribution, retail, and service industry customers. More than 40 years of experience with our customers' unique business processes and operational requirements is built into every solution—in the cloud, hosted, or on premises. With a deep understanding of your industry, Epicor solutions spur growth while managing complexity. The result is powerful solutions that free your resources so you can grow your business. For more information, connect with Epicor or visit www.epicor.com.

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