



Great Northern Corp.

Company Facts

- Location: Oshkosh, Wisconsin, United States
- Industry: Folding Carton Manufacturer
- Web site: www.greatnortherncorp.com

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Christine Toutant, Office Manager | Great Northern Corp.

Success Highlights

Challenges

- Manual planning board
- Estimating of complex products
- Obsolete shop floor data collection system
- Increasing customer communications

Solution

- Epicor AVP

Benefits

- Robust and easy-to-use estimating module with the ability to model different production scenarios for different quantities for a range of complex products
- Improved internal communication as a result of the Epicor scheduling system
- Optimization of the production plan with improved control and monitoring of production constraints, such as availability of dies, plates, inks and artwork approvals
- Improved inventory efficiency and tracking with Epicor SmarTrak

Need for a new system

When Great Northern Corporation, a Wisconsin-based packaging company, decided it was time to replace its existing business system with a new software system in their retail packaging facility in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, the implementation team at this growing operation was committed to seeing the project through successfully. Tired of their time-consuming manual scheduling processes and the inflexibility of their existing software designed for corrugated manufacturing operations, the implementation team set out to find a solution that fit their complex needs.

At the Oshkosh facility, Great Northern produces their StrataGraph® branded product line, a laminated paperboard packaging and display solution designed for the retail marketplace. They chose Epicor AVP—business software built specifically for the flexible packaging industry. With careful planning and preparation, the facility went live with the software just three months after the project start date. Now, during their busy peak season, the plant is reaping the benefits that the industry-specific software from Epicor can deliver.

Preparation pays

Before the Oshkosh facility embarked on the process of implementing their new business software, they set some clear objectives. The plant wanted to eliminate all manual processes, such as using the time-consuming manual scheduling board, as well as find a way to reduce overtime and staff additions. They also needed a system that could handle the unique StrataGraph® product lines that are web-offset printed on paperboard or flexible film and then laminated.

Dedicated to installing the system prior to the onset of their busiest season, the plant appointed an implementation team headed up by Office Manager Christine Toutant. With Toutant's leadership, the help from the dedicated team of super users (responsible for internal training on specific modules), and the up-front scenario training from Epicor, Great Northern met the initial deadline successfully. "The support from Epicor was just awesome," says Toutant. "They were there throughout the implementation process and the go-live, and were very responsive to any of our problems and queries, getting back to us with step-by-step instructions and screen shots immediately."

Feeling the benefits

Everyone at the Oshkosh facility is now using Epicor AVP and realizing the benefits, from the people at the customer service desk to those on the shop floor. "We're especially feeling the benefits of the Estimating module," explains Toutant, "as it's just so robust and easy to use." With its ability to model different production scenarios for different quantities for a range of complex products, the system's estimating module has enabled the Oshkosh facility to fine-tune all aspects of their business processes. "We have been very impressed by the sheer flexibility of the Epicor AVP estimating module," says Toutant. "We can apply different run rates and work centers by using this module, and are now able to accurately capture all of our costs. For example, the system automatically adjusts to the fact that some of our complex die-cutting jobs run slower. This enables us to price projects more accurately."

The flexibility of the estimating module handles all of the different product lines and enables people to prepare quotes quickly and accurately regardless of the complex nature of their packaging solutions.

"We offer engineered solutions in which various materials are laminated together. With Epicor AVP, we have been able to easily build these products into the system and price them effectively," Toutant says.

Faster and smoother scheduling

Eliminating the manual scheduling process was a key requirement of the new core business system at Oshkosh. Epicor AVP replaced the old and obsolete manual planning board with its state-of-the-art integrated Advanced Planning & Scheduling module. With this software, the schedule can now be viewed or printed in up to 12 formats, and the changes to the plan are immediately visible to everybody. Jobs can be automatically scheduled with the powerful forward, backward and bottleneck loading options.

"The scheduling module has brought many benefits to our business, especially its integration with the other parts of the Epicor AVP system. The flow of information around the plant is now smoother and faster," says Toutant. "Because everybody has access to the electronic scheduling board simultaneously, from customer service personnel all the way to the people on the production floor, the module has had a remarkable impact on communication within our organization."

Other improvements include the control and monitoring of production constraints, such as availability of dies, plates, inks and artwork approvals, which are critical to the optimization of the production plan. This has been an unexpected benefit for those operating the system at the Oshkosh facility. "This has come as a pleasant surprise, as we didn't realize how useful the constraints would be. They have given us great visibility to things that have a significant impact on our schedule."

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Great Northern has also implemented Epicor SmarTrak, an inventory tracking module that automates inventory management, and eliminates the need for costly manual inventory counts. SmarTrak uses Radio Frequency bar-coded tracking to improve inventory accuracy and warehouse productivity, and has provided Great Northern with a valuable tool that they now couldn't imagine being without. "Now, it is so easy to track a load, and where and when it has gone using the vehicle-mounted screens. The module has really helped us clean up raw materials and finished goods. Everything is much more organized," says Toutant.

True understanding

The business objectives that the implementation team set before the introduction of the new system have all been met, but the real benefits have come from how the software supports the organization's business model. "The true benefit of working with Epicor comes from their knowledge not only of their software, but their true understanding of the consumer packaging industry," says Toutant. "They really understood our business, and all the features within the Epicor AVP software have helped us meet our goals and objectives as a company."

One of Great Northern's value propositions is 'responsiveness,' and Epicor AVP has enabled the company to maximize their responsiveness in a number of ways. "All of our employees now have access to all the information within the system that is readily available around the clock. This has benefited specifically our customer service personnel as they can now respond to customer enquiries quickly and accurately," says Toutant. "We are also a lot more responsive in the sense that we can get orders out quickly, and our excellent visibility means we can now make firm commitments to the customers and deliver on our promises."

About Epicor

Epicor Software Corporation is a global leader delivering business software solutions to the manufacturing, distribution, retail, and service industries. With more than 40 years of experience, Epicor has more than 20,000 customers in over 150 countries. Epicor solutions enable companies to drive increased efficiency and improve profitability. With a history of innovation, industry expertise, and passion for excellence, Epicor inspires customers to build lasting competitive advantage. Epicor provides the single point of accountability that local, regional, and global businesses demand. For more information, visit www.epicor.com.



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