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Sure Plus Manufacturing

Relevant's Adaptability Leverages Sure Plus Manufacturing's Unique Business Practices

Sure Plus Manufacturing in Chicago Heights, Ill., produces the trucking industry's most distinctive line of quality mirrors. These safety mirrors and assemblies are shipped throughout the world and are available in several styles, such as chrome, fender-mounted, convex, and rear, depending on the safety concerns of the vehicle.

Since 1990, this industry-leading company has ensured its customers get the products they want when they want them by employing Relevant Business Systems' ERP software, configured to meet Sure Plus' demanding needs. Just as importantly, Relevant software helps Sure Plus manage and service its salespeople, most of whom are self-employed.

"Because of the way our business is structured, we needed a system that would not only keep up with our growing needs, but could also be adapted to the way we work," explains Patti Rivera, Systems Manager for Sure Plus Manufacturing. "Our production, reporting, invoicing, and packing slip programs are unique to our business."

The key to creating a system that leverages Sure Plus Manufacturing's unique business practices was modular ERP software. As a result, Sure Plus could optimize its system by selecting from among the many available applications and modules and uniquely configure them to address their specific needs.

"That's only part of the solution, however," emphasizes Relevant CEO Pat Garrehy.

"Our people have put in a lot of systems and know how to stretch every bit of capability out of our various modules. Upon analyzing what Sure-Plus wanted to do, we were able to configure our system in ways that made sense to them while still keeping their software and infrastructure costs to a minimum."

"Customizations from Relevant let us incorporate our own business practices (such as combining several steps into one procedure), making them easier for us to do and more efficient," adds Rivera. "Producing over 600 invoices a week is no small task. These adaptations have made our job functions less time-consuming and our business lives easier."

For example, once all orders are in, Sure Plus runs an allocation on the Relevant system. The system then internally creates packing slips, allocates and ships product, and prints invoices without any other commands.

Managing the Sales Team

Sure Plus is very proud to be the first company in its industry with a national sales force that can provide customers with immediate assistance. With 32 independent salespeople, Sure-Plus actually needs the same type of system as a very large multi-plant company. With Relevant, two different modules work together to make sure the system does what's needed. First of all, the Sales Order Management module lets Sure-Plus input and track customer orders, collecting and maintaining both product- and customer-

related data for the entire sales order cycle, from initial order entry through shipping and invoicing.

“We keep track of all orders entered, which salesperson has which account, and information on all customers,” Rivera says. “We can immediately access the customer name as well as their shipment and billing addresses. The system performs our sales tax computations and is also our product catalog control (where we go to get product descriptions and prices).

“As each sales order is entered, each line item is automatically priced based on tables maintained within the system,” Rivera adds. “And as each shipment is made against a sales order, the information for invoicing is automatically generated. We can also determine which salespeople are selling and which individual customers are ordering, gaining a historical perspective on what is being sold and purchased by specific organizations, thus enabling us to spot buying trends.”

Going the next step, Sure Plus then creatively uses Relevant’s Multi-Division module to break them out from the “house.” As a result, each salesperson (i.e. division) has his/her own breakout of inventory, cost, supply, and demand records. In manufacturing industry terms, the “supply division” (Sure Plus), plans, acquires and transfers product to the “requiring division” and the salesperson. In other words, the material is manufactured at Sure Plus and upon an order, is automatically transferred to the salesperson.

Managing Costs is Key

By maintaining all item and component costs in the Relevant system, Sure Plus knows exactly what it costs, in both parts and labor, to make each mirror. Not only does this help in pricing product and to verify that new production runs of the product are as efficient as the standards, Purchasing also uses the Manufacturing Cost Control module to verify that the costs of to-be-ordered items and components are on target. Of course, these stored costs also give Purchasing a baseline to use when looking for better pricing from their vendors.

The Production Engineering module typically provides for the entry and maintenance of items, structuring the Bills of Materials, and implementing engineering change control. Active parts are automatically copied into other item master files (such as Inventory Control) to assure consistency of information throughout the system and provide data entry efficiencies. Needless to say, Sure Plus adds a twist.

“We use it as the basis for our actual invoicing,” Rivera shares. “Not only do we get our actual costs, including salesman costs for creating commissions, but this module actually provides the prices for our invoicing.”

You might expect the same thing to happen with other modules. For instance, Relevant originally created the Engineering Change Order (ECO) module for aerospace and defense contractors who were continually updating designs. ECO then enforces discipline and management control

over modifications to bills of materials and shop floor routings. As component and operation changes pass through an authorization and approval process, they are logged into an ECO history database.

As a result, when the component demands for each work order are created, the configurations are based on the release date of the orders compared to the ECO effective dates on the bills of materials. Sure Plus gets down to fundamentals.

“We use Engineering Change Order to provide the basic set-up of all of our components and products,” Rivera attests. “It is used for all orders sent to our salespeople and relieves our finished goods. Once an order is input into the system, this module says, ‘Here are the components you will need to build these products and the number of products needed’. It also tells you what has come out of finished goods to help fill that order.”

Relevant’s Inventory Control serves as the hub for all material transactions while monitoring and controlling the execution of the material plan. It maintains the inventory attributes for items, allows review of the current time-phased material plan for an item, upholds work orders and purchase requisitions, and records all material movements and stock adjustments.

“We have 32 salespeople and Inventory Control keeps track of all of their products and lets us know what they’re selling,” Rivera adds. “Plus, it

gives us all the standard information one might expect, such as what we have for finished goods and our stock of components for production. To ensure that we always have the parts we need to produce mirrors in a timely manner, we get reorder point reports letting us know when we have reached our safety stock levels.”

There is No Substitute for Creativity

Sure-Plus is exactly the type of company that profits from a system such as Relevant’s. While larger organizations, such as Lockheed-Martin, use almost every module to its fullest extent, Sure-Plus efficiently leverages the attributes of the basic modules plus a few others, using them creatively to

maximize their competitive advantages. From running a sales organization of independent companies, to tracking orders from beginning to end, to making sure each individual order is filled on time, Sure-Plus capitalizes on its own creativity and that of the Relevant solution.