



THE COMPUTERWORLD HONORS PROGRAM

CASE STUDY

ORGANIZATION:

Ace Clearwater Enterprises, Inc.

PROJECT NAME:

SOA Solution Brings Manufacturer Increased Flexibility, Reliability, and Scalability

Summary

ACE Clearwater Enterprises (ACE) is a family-owned manufacturer of sheet metal products, specializing in complex formed and welded assemblies for the aerospace, automotive, and power-generation industries. ACE has more than 250,000 square feet of manufacturing space and three facilities in southern California. Notable customers include Honeywell, Lockheed Martin, General Electric, the US Government, Bell Helicopter, Cessna, Boeing and Liebherr Aerospace.

Over the past two decades, the company has logged an impressive growth record. In 1985, the company had revenues of \$10 million. By 1995 the company had doubled its annual sales to over \$20 million, and today company revenues are in excess of \$26 million.

To support ACE's accelerated pace of business and enhance its competitive edge, ACE decided to upgrade its antiquated ERP system to a flexible, all-in-one manufacturing solution that gathers data and distributes it in real time to users across the entire company for analysis and decision-making. The system also had to fit ACE's business environment and offer user-friendly installation, upgrades and maintenance, and a lower total cost of ownership and simpler overall system administration.

ACE Clearwater became one of the first midsize manufacturers to implement Vantage 8 from Epicor Software Corporation, (NASDAQ: EPIC), a leading provider of enterprise business software solutions to midmarket companies around the world. The industry's first manufacturing software solution based on a 100-percent service-oriented architecture (SOA), Epicor Vantage 8 best satisfied ACE's criteria, and its .NET infrastructure enabled ACE to implement the solution rapidly and efficiently.

Introductory Overview

Business Challenges:

ACE Clearwater had the need for a flexible, integrated system that could aggregate and distribute real-time data to users across the entire company for analysis and decision-making

LOCATION:
*Irvine, California,
United States*

YEAR:
2006

STATUS:
Laureate

CATEGORY:
Manufacturing

NOMINATING COMPANY:
Epicor



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Solution:

ACE found what they were looking for in Epicor Vantage 8, the manufacturing industry's first all-in-one solution with 100% service-oriented architecture (SOA) and .NET platform

Business Benefits:

- Ability to implement rapidly and efficiently
- User-friendly installation, upgrades and maintenance
- Improved supply chain management and customer connectivity
- Reduced dependence on paperwork

The Results:

“We knew Epicor would stand behind its product and continue to implement new features and innovations. Epicor Vantage 8.0, the industry's first manufacturing software solution based on a 100-percent service-oriented architecture (SOA), best satisfied ACE's criteria.”

Benefits

Vantage 8 has delivered the following key benefits: better, faster decision-making through improved visibility; user-friendly installation, upgrades and maintenance; improved supply chain management; reduced dependence on paperwork; a real-time grasp of work-in-process and capacity constraints, The system optimizes scheduling, enables ACE to better manage costs, and provides real-time operational visibility—for everything from sales orders, job orders, and purchase orders. The system also supports electronic data interchange for collaborative manufacturing. ACE's customers send engineering drawings via broadband; the company can receive and transfer proprietary data from anywhere in the world, and deliver it right to the tool designers.

ACE was facing a number of issues that lead them to look for a new ERP system:

- Customers wanted shorter lead times
- Customers expected annual price reductions
- And, customers wanted to tap into the company's systems to track orders on a real-time basis

The criteria that ACE was looking for in their ERP selection process:

- A system that would collect data on a real-time basis, and port data to users quickly and easily
- A system that fit ACE's discrete make-to-order manufacturing environment
- And, a system that was easy to install and maintain, especially to its out-lying facilities

Epicor Vantage 8 met all the criteria, and was a fully integrated system that everyone in the company could use. Every department at ACE uses Vantage, including estimating, contracts, engineering, MRP planning, purchasing, operations, quality, stores, shipping/receiving, and finance and accounting.

According to King Lum, Director of Progress, Ace Clearwater Enterprises, part traceability is very important to ACE customers, particularly in the aerospace industry. “The lot-tracing capabilities within Vantage help accelerate the part traceability process.”

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“Customers want immediate visibility on the status of their orders – they don’t want to wait,” says Lum. Vantage’s Web services-based service-oriented architecture makes that possible - this is a competitive advantage for the company.

The Importance of Technology

ACE considered the new ERP system to be a critical step toward efficiency for the company. Epicor Vantage 8 is “a make-to-order system that fits ACE well, is user friendly, Windows compatible, and built on a .NET architecture,” Lum explained.

The system tracks the entire process, from estimating through shipping and invoicing. The company’s old store-and-forward data system “wasn’t in real-time, and we couldn’t use the data fast enough,” he adds. The new system, which collects data in real-time as operators barcode items on the shop floor, “tracks costs better and improves scheduling and production control.”

Featuring an n-tier architecture built with Microsoft .NET and Web services technology, the Epicor Vantage 8 manufacturing solution is completely architected from the ground up to support growing market demand for service-oriented architectures (SOAs), which enable businesses to leverage best-in-class software services through open industry standards, thus simplifying application-to-application integration and supply chain connectivity. The new architecture exposes all functionality as Web services, which makes it easier to orchestrate businesses processes and workflows within the application in order to promote lean principles and continuous performance initiatives. It also offers new levels of application reliability, scalability, system interoperability and flexibility, combined with a rich and personalized user experience.

Vantage 8 is a comprehensive solution designed to meet the needs of progressive make-to-order and mixed-mode manufacturing companies. Designed to meet the needs of midmarket manufacturers, the solution includes built-in workflows managing the entire order cycle: from marketing and sales through production and planning, sourcing and procurement, installation and service, through to financial recognition.

Originality

ACE established several benchmarks for the new ERP system: training; technical support and innovation were key.

-Because Vantage is user-friendly and easy to use, ACE was able to train a manufacturing intern to use the manufacturing planning module within an hour

-Epicor’s technical support has also been very responsive to ACE throughout the implementation process and beyond – King Lum comments, “it is probably the best in this industry!”

-And, Epicor continues to innovate and improve the Vantage product!

For ACE, innovation is a critical factor – “in our industry, there are innovative companies and there are dead companies,” says Gary Johnson, vice president of ACE. “Epicor has allowed ACE to be innovative – customers on a real-time basis can tap into the ACE database – this is a huge plus, and puts us in a great light with customers. We’re on the cutting edge with Epicor.”

Vantage 8 is the manufacturing industry’s first all-in-one solution with 100% service-oriented architecture (SOA) and .NET platform – business benefits that ACE has realized include:



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- Ability to implement rapidly and efficiently
- User-friendly installation, upgrades and maintenance
- Improved supply chain management and customer connectivity
- Reduced dependence on paperwork

“We knew Epicor would stand behind its product and continue to implement new features and innovations,” says Lum. “Vantage 8 already has delivered a real-time grasp of work-in-process and capacity constraints. We deployed this system to optimize scheduling, better manage costs, and increase visibility over everything we do—including sales orders, job orders, and purchase orders – that visibility on a real-time basis is a key benefit.”

Success

Less Paper-Pushing, More Visibility

The integrated Vantage solution means less paper-pushing, a goal ACE first established five years ago. For example, Vantage gives ACE online, real-time visibility of contract review requirements for ISO quality certification. Previously, paper was shuffled between separate tracking systems and databases. Furthermore, quality documentation is now incorporated directly into Vantage, rather than ACE personnel recording bad parts on separate paper forms.

Because Vantage is based on the .NET platform, ACE users now share information across applications with analytical tools, which Lum calls “a tremendous time-saving benefit.” Reports can be easily modified and special business activity queries (BAQ) written to deliver real-time data to ACE users. For ACE’s purchasing staff, Lum says Vantage reports and BAQs give them critical information and optimal visibility in managing the company’s supply chain.

According to Lum, ACE has really benefited from a responsive .NET platform. Vantage 8 already has delivered a real-time grasp of work-in-process and capacity constraints. “We deployed this system to optimize scheduling, better manage costs, and increase visibility over everything we do—including sales orders, job orders, and purchase orders,” says Lum. “That visibility on a real-time basis is a key benefit.”

Customers are also embracing the technology innovation – the customers want immediate visibility on the status of their orders and Vantage’s Web services-based service-oriented architecture makes that possible.

Difficulty

“We’ve found Vantage 8 to be easy to learn and very user-friendly,” notes Lum, adding that the applications and clients are easy to install, upgrade and maintain. Using ACE’s existing Windows platform and TCP/IP infrastructure eliminates the need for propriety hardware and infrastructure.

“Vantage 8 is a solid product, built on the Microsoft .NET platform from the ground up — it’s very responsive,” says Lum. “Very responsive” is also how Lum describes Epicor’s technical support. “They are the best I’ve experienced in the industry.” ACE uses Vantage throughout the entire company, with 50 users and 20 barcode sessions.



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ACE established a clear set of criteria when embarking on the search for a new ERP solution to replace their 12-year old UNIX-based system. ACE wanted a system built on innovative, cutting edge technology that would:

- collect data on a real-time basis, and port data to users quickly and easily
- fit ACE's discrete make-to-order manufacturing environment
- that was easy to install and maintain

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