

# SPECIALTY PRODUCTS GETS ORDER AUTOMATION FAST SHIPPING WITH VAI ERP

Manufacturer Specialty Products started from the ground up when it ditched its MRP and implemented the VAI ERP system

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When an enterprise system touches every corner of a business, that system needs to be better than just all right. Manufacturers that rely on their ERP to manage products from order to assembly to distribution can't afford to settle for software that doesn't satisfy their needs. For Longmont, Colo.-based Specialty Products Company, a manufacturer of automotive suspension parts and tools, the day came when it was time to kick a poorly performing manufacturing resource planning system to the curb and adopt a new package – in this case, VAI ERP.

Specialty Products has been using VAI ERP since 2004. Prior to that implementation, the company had been on an older manufacturing resource planning (MRP) system for many years, said Mina Cox, chief operating officer

at Specialty Products and member of that VAI software selection and implementation team. The now-defunct ASK Corporation provided Specialty Products' original MRP system, she explained. The company then migrated to the BPCS MRP package from SSA – now owned by Infor.

"We had a lot of issues with BPCS," Cox said. "The support was horrible, and the software was very slow and difficult to keep up to date. We were just really unhappy with it."

Enough was finally enough for Specialty Products, and it began what Cox described as an "extensive search" for a new system. "For our company, it was a big deal to change a complete system, because we use everything in a package," she said. "We rely on a really integrated system because of how fast our

business moves. So for us, it was very important to make sure that, since we were moving away from something, what we were moving into would be a good decision."

## **Navigating ERP vendor selection**

Specialty Products considered several ERP vendors, including PeopleSoft, JD Edwards and HarrisData. "We had a whole team that worked at looking at the packages, with one person from every major department, so everybody was brought into it," Cox said.

In the end, the company chose the VAI ERP package for three main reasons, according to Cox. First, the review team found it to be a stable product. Second, the graphical user interface was simple and easy to adjust to Specialty Products' business needs. Finally, the VAI system



could handle both the company's manufacturing and distribution capabilities.

"Even though we're a manufacturer, we also act very much like a distributor with all the warehousing we do," Cox said. "Every order that we get in, whether it's one or a thousand, we ship that same day; we need to have a good stocking inventory, as well as great manufacturing ability behind that so we don't get overextended in inventory and not have the parts for our customers."

### **Vendor support helps guide ERP implementation**

The VAI ERP implementation process took six months, Cox added, and it went smoothly. "The project managers that [VAI] assigned to us were very knowledgeable, along with two full-time in-house people on the project to write the conversions for our brand," she said.

Specialty Products uses nearly every module offered in the VAI

ERP package to manage data during the entire manufacturing process, Cox said, starting with forecasting customer needs. From that forecast, an MRP schedule is developed that drives the company's work orders, purchases and product assembly.

Customer orders are automated through VAI. As soon as an order is taken over the phone, it's also being printed out, picked and barcoded. "We have an over 99% accuracy rate and on-time shipment with all of our customers," Cox said.

While Specialty Products is generally satisfied with VAI ERP, the company has some future improvements on its wish list. "There's still quite a bit of batch processing when we want to move things around inventory, and we have what we call 'tool crib visibility' that we would like to see in the package," said Cox. There are many machines in the Specialty Products manufacturing facility that need tools, such as

inserts and product consumables, and batch processes are currently handling these needs, she explained. "We would like everything to be instantaneous, real-time, with bar codes that can be scanned," Cox said.

Cox noted that the support side of things is already very good, but said it would be helpful to have a knowledge base available on the VAI support site so Specialty Products IT staff could look up and solve issues on their own without waiting for a service rep.

Additionally, Specialty Products would like to be able to manipulate its e-commerce site, according to Cox. "We would like to have a broader ability to really change the screens and have more flexibility, so we can really integrate it into our main site," she said. The company's material manager attended VAI's user conference this past year and submitted these proposals, so the changes may show up on the next upgrade package, she added.

