



customer success story
discrete manufacturing

“Cost-effective, on-time deliveries are about the only advantages we have left to exploit. With Lean, things go through quicker, and you get the double bonus of throughput dollars first and then the premium price second.”

Infor's Lean Solution Helps ATS Gain Competitive Advantage

Advanced Tooling Specialists, Inc. (ATS) is a specialty tool shop with specific expertise in the design and building of tooling for the thermoform, metal stamping, ductile iron trim die, wire EDM, and custom machining industries. Although ATS had plenty of projects in the pipeline, employees weren't as busy as they should have been. On-time delivery was a significant problem, and they were constantly expediting projects. Between expedition cycles, they found themselves “wondering what to work on next.” In its search for a scheduling system that would streamline processes and utilize manpower in the most efficient way possible, ATS discovered the Infor VISUAL Easy Lean solution.

In addition to knowing for some time that he wanted to run the company in a lean fashion, ATS president, Jim Luebke had also known that he had the support of his managers, something that helped both the decision-making and implementation processes considerably. “Our people understood that the end goal of implementing the software was to make a more efficient, lean company.” After a rapid setup, ATS was off and running. “We never looked back or second guessed the decision. Our company lives and breathes the Infor VISUAL™ system now. It does a great job for us.”

Wanting to ensure that his company's infrastructure could meet the increasing market conditions he envisioned, ATS president Jim Luebke began looking for a Lean software solution that would streamline his processes and increase productivity. “Volume wise, we wanted to bring in other types of work and be competitive to help fill in some of the resources we had excess capacity in, and I really felt we couldn't tackle that with the system we had in place.”

IMPLEMENTING A FLEXIBLE, PROVEN SOLUTION

ATS was already using Infor VISUAL Enterprise with some success, but Luebke thought its Concurrent Scheduler feature too labor intensive, as it required a designated person to maintain the associated setup and run times. “In our build-to-order environment, where we deal with constant ECNs and fluxes in customer orders, we really needed Concurrent Scheduler to run in real time, which is impossible. You have to run it at different points during the day, twice a day, three times a day, but it was never true to what actually had to be done. We felt we had become slaves to the computer trying to determine what had to be done next.”

When Luebke began looking for a Lean software solution, he had certain criteria in mind. For starters, it had to be easily adaptable to ATS' unique manufacturing environment, allowing the user to develop a chart of accounts for, and run with, different product codes and the varied types of manufacturing the company did. It had to include multiple accounting features that would allow Luebke to group resources, but burden them separately for the different types of work. Importantly, it also needed to integrate with Infor VISUAL Enterprise. For these reasons and more, Luebke thought his logical choice was Infor VISUAL Easy Lean.

Infor VISUAL Easy Lean is a scheduling method that helps companies dramatically reduce lead times, increase on-time delivery performance, improve productivity and profitability, and enhance customer service. Unlike traditional scheduling systems, Infor VISUAL Easy Lean is a “pull” versus “push” based solution that uses market demand as the trigger for releasing work to the shop floor. Manufacturing companies around the world have experienced remarkable results almost immediately after implementing the solution, and ATS was no exception.

“We’re now seeing huge profits due to increased throughput. Based on two years ago when we were at the same level, we can handle 25 percent more volume with the same number of people, and we’re seeing probably 40 percent more to the bottom line.”

Due to Luebke’s leadership and his team’s enthusiasm for TOC, the decision to purchase Easy Lean and the implementation process went very smoothly. “My guys embraced it; they really ran with it.” The challenge for Luebke was changing the way he’d always viewed his processes. No company president likes to see employees standing idle, and he was confident that Infor VISUAL Easy Lean was going to improve productivity to the point where they might potentially find themselves with all work in progress completed. He knew he’d have to focus hard on sales to keep the pipeline filled with new work—something that proved difficult in the first month after installation. “We ramped up with the software and basically drained our pipeline, but we hadn’t kicked in the necessary sales and marketing efforts to prevent eating through our backlog.”

THE RESULTS

With that situation quickly remedied, Luebke experienced an immediate and dramatic turnaround. In the second month after implementation, ATS saw a record bottom line and had a record first quarter as a result. Now in Q3, the company is on its way to another record quarter.

“We’re now seeing huge profits due to increased throughput. Based on two years ago when we were at the same level, we can handle 25 percent more volume with the same number of people, and we’re seeing probably 40 percent more to the bottom line. I’m not kidding, if I compare the last couple of months, I’m a happy camper. Capacity in the shop seems about 50 percent of what I was doing before, yet the bottom line is much bigger. It’s difficult to describe the change, but it’s a very comfortable change.”

Aside from the obvious bottom line benefits the system has provided, Luebke also finds that his people seem much happier. “My general manager who runs the scheduler and makes sure things happen loves it because he can run it as often as necessary during the day and knows what has to be done first and what is critical. My people on the floor benefit from it the most, and those initiating the work in the system—the ones setting the buffers on it—simply plug it in and go. After that, it becomes so automatic it’s really working behind the scenes.”

ATS’ newfound capability has given it more confidence to quote faster delivery times, which often results in a premium price for its product. Luebke explains that the company “has become more opportunistic. I’m actually holding back about 25 percent capacity for certain types of projects, because I find that at times when I peak that capacity for expediting something special, I’m able to get superior dollars for it. Customers are willing to pay a premium now because they know we can build a more efficient machine. They know we can deliver on time.”

As for the future, Luebke doesn’t think he’s even close to reaching capacity yet. “I don’t think we’ve reached capacity in any shape or form, but right now we’re on a record pace in terms of revenue—one that I didn’t think we’d hit for two years. Every time we think we may be at 100 percent, it seems we still have room in our system.”

www.infor.com

500 Lafayette Road
Hampton, NH 03842

Tel: 603.926.9696
Fax: 603.929.3975