ACME ALLIANCE

Lean manufacturer Acme Alliance, LLC relies on the Software as a Service (SaaS) Odyssey ERP system from Progress Partner, B&L Information Systems, to optimize its operations while reducing costs. Based on the Progress OpenEdge platform, Odyssey supports the unique requirements of the metalcaster while freeing the company from the burden and resources required to maintain an on-premise application. Since implementing Odyssey, Acme has gained real-time visibility across its operations and increased its business agility to react to change or potential problems in order to maximize its processes and boost its bottom line.

ACME ALLIANCE, LLC OPTIMIZES LEAN MANUFACTURING WITH CLOUD-BASED ERP SOLUTION FROM B&L INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND PROGRESS

Two years ago, Acme Alliance, LLC found itself at a crossroads. After seven years, the die casting manufacturer's existing Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system was rev-locked. Acme had customized the software application so much over the years that it had become too inflexible to meet the needs of the business, and the company's hardware environment had also become antiquated. Consequently, there were a number of modern business processes Acme was unable to do with the existing ERP system. The company had two choices—re-implement the ERP solution and start the customization process all over again or find a new ERP application. "We are a modern, innovative company, but our ERP system lacked the agility to support where we wanted to take our business," explains Dennis Decman, Assistant Controller for Acme Alliance.

Rather than being discouraged, the company saw an opportunity to put new technology in place that would allow them to modernize operations to better align with the business and support Acme's Lean manufacturing environment. Acme recently took their Northbrook, Illinois aluminum die casting operation live with the Software as a Service (SaaS) Odyssey ERP program, developed by B&L Information Systems, a Progress Partner company. Based on the Progress® OpenEdge® Integrated Development Platform, the Odyssey ERP system enables metalcasting operations to collect, manage and analyze crucial business information needed to track specific costs and boost profits.

More than generic accounting or manufacturing software, Odyssey meets the special needs of foundries, die casters, investment casters, machine shops and related operations, as well as the needs of every role within a company's operation. "We chose the Odyssey system over other ERP alternatives because it was the only solution developed specifically for metalcasters," explains Anthony Dizonno, Systems Administrator for Acme Alliance. "We spent so much time and money customizing our other ERP solution; we didn't want to have to go through that again. Odyssey already had

CHALLENGE

Legacy ERP system too inflexible to support Acme Alliance's Lean business model

SOLUTION

Software as a Service (SaaS) Odyssey™ ERP system developed by Progress Partner, B&L Information Systems, based on the Progress OpenEdge Integrated Development Platform

BENEFIT

Real-time visibility into both employee production and process quality analysis enables Acme Alliance to make quick adjustments that impact the bottom line; cloud-based system reduced IT hardware costs as well as staff time and resources while providing both increased security and Disaster Recovery resources

most of the functionality we needed, plus the industry-specific features and terminology we required."

The flexibility of the Progress OpenEdge platform has enabled B&L to build a unique application to fit the specific needs of its industry. And the platform gives B&L the ability to quickly respond to the requirements of its customers, as in the case of Acme Alliance. "We have a very active customer community," says Matthew Gacek, Vice President of Business Development for B&L Information Systems. "Progress OpenEdge gives us the agility to respond to their needs in a timely manner. In fact, B&L had eight maintenance releases last year alone, and we come out with a new version almost every year. That is a huge benefit to B&L customers and a competitive differentiator for us."

PEACE OF MIND WITH SAAS

As a SaaS ERP solution, Odyssey has freed Acme from the cost, time and resources required to purchase and maintain physical servers and databases. "B&L Information Systems takes care of all of that for us. We reap the benefits of having a secure, up-to-date, modern application without any of the headaches, hassles and costs inherent with an on-premise system," says Dizonno. Acme also relies on B&L to manage Disaster Recovery for its mission-critical ERP system, ensuring automatic failover to a replicated server in the event of a failure or natural disaster. "With our cloud-based Odyssey system, I now have peace of mind that the system will be running how we need it, when we need it – regardless of what may occur in my server room."

The Progress OpenEdge platform plays a vital role in the application's stability and uptime. B&L built Odyssey on Progress OpenEdge due in part to the stability of the OpenEdge database "Progress has given us a rock solid platform to work with, which means no crashes or downtime— that's critical in our industry and critical to us as a service provider," explains Gacek. "B&L's internal standard for downtime is extremely strict, 99.5% uptime. And we have never come even close to reaching that 0.5% of downtime with Progress OpenEdge," says Gacek.

A METHODICAL APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTATION

Acme's management committed a core team to facilitate the ERP transition and implementation. The Acme team trained on Odyssey and consulted with B&L staff to create Acme-specific business and implementation procedures based on "B&L's Steps to a Successful ERP Conversion Plan", as well as created a training plan for the company.

Prior to developing the implementation plan, B&L spent two days on site with Acme to experience their Lean manufacturing operation first hand. "ERP implementations are always daunting experiences with hidden surprises. Fortunately for Acme, the 'surprise' elements were mitigated through the expertise of B&L's staff. The B&L team intimately learned Acme's Lean business model, enabling us to make optimal decisions from the very beginning for the best possible results. Additionally, from day one, B&L's staff was not just a resource for us, but true members of the Acme Alliance team. I felt that they showed genuine ownership of our implementation," says Roy DuSell, Controller.

The team followed B&L's implementation plan, which allowed the company to implement best practices throughout the five-step process involving file conversion, reviewing, training, user testing and going live. B&L also served as a mentor for Acme, advising the company on various options within the Odyssey software throughout the process.

"They never told us what we had to do, but rather presented us with various choices and explained why we may want to use something or how it would affect our business. That level of transparency and information was invaluable," says Decman.

"Implementing the Odyssey ERP system gives us the ability to capture and utilize data – including crucial shop floor data - in ways we only used to dream of."

Mike Anderson
Kaizen Promotion Officer
Acme Alliance, LLC

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Matthew Gacek
VP Business Development
B&L Information Systems

DRIVING OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Utilizing Odyssey's Shop Floor Manager module to provide real-time information to Acme's 115 employees was key to continuing Acme's Lean improvement process. Appropriate for an ISO 9001:2008 certified manufacturer whose value stream production system was established to control process flow, reduce waste and improve quality, Acme Alliance began the ERP implementation with the Scrap Control, Materials Inventory, Product Inventory, Financial and Shop Floor Manager modules of Odyssey.

Lean manufacturing is all about reducing waste. Using the Shop Floor Manager module, Acme has gained deeper insight into the strengths and weaknesses of various operations and how they are impacting the business. As a result, the company can make quick adjustments that impact the bottom line. For example, Acme now requires employees to report their production against the shop order via Odyssey. Management can review that information in real time to measure production levels.

As part of that process, employees are also required to enter information about the amount of scrap they produce during a specific job, giving management real-time access to accurate scrap reporting and the ability to quickly identify where there is room for improvement in the process. "This gives us the capability to understand if we have internal scrap, where it is, in what quantities, and what we can do to decrease scrap. Closing those points of weakness can impact our bottom line," says Mike Anderson, Kaizen Promotion Officer.

Acme opted for a phased approach to implementing Odyssey. Initially, the company chose to tackle the basics so it could quickly start reporting on production, manage finances, and effectively manage material and product inventory. In the near future, the company plans to implement additional Odyssey features and modules, including the Quality Viewer and Maintenance modules.

"Implementing the Odyssey ERP system gives us the ability to capture and utilize data – including crucial shop floor data - in ways we only used to dream of. I am already impressed with the data we are getting out of the system, and we have only been live a matter of months," says Anderson. "We are extremely happy with the Odyssey implementation and look forward to growing into more of the Odyssey features in the future."

"The metalcasting industry is always looking for ways to make better decisions, faster," states Gacek. "Using the Progress OpenEdge platform allows B&L to grow the Odyssey ERP solution to better serve our metalcasting customers through reliable performance and continuous improvement."

"We have a very active customer community. Progress OpenEdge gives us the agility to respond to their needs in a timely manner. In fact, B&L had eight maintenance releases last year alone, and we come out with a new version almost every year. That is a huge benefit to B&L customers and a competitive differentiator for us."

Matthew Gacek
VP Business Development
B&L Information Systems

PROGRESS

ABOUT ACME ALLIANCE, LLC

Acme Alliance has produced die cast components since 1964; the company started its Lean journey in 2001. Acme's constant vigilance to the reduction of waste and continuous improvement of production processes benefit clients. Quicker turns, one piece flow, kanban inventory management and standardized die cast tool build, reduce up-front dollars and inventory throughout the extended value stream. www.acmealliance.com

ABOUT B&L INFORMATION SYSTEMS

POWERED BY PROGRESS

B&L Information Systems is a global leader in providing integrated enterprise resource planning (ERP) for metalcasters. For over 35 years, B&L has used their deep understanding of the specific challenges and problems of foundries and die casters to create an ERP solution which matches the way metalcasters operate, making it easier to learn and use. With Odyssey, metalcasters will maximize their resources, minimize costs, and make better decisions faster. www.blinfo.com

PROGRESS SOFTWARE

Progress Software Corporation (NASDAQ: PRGS) is a global software company that simplifies the development, deployment and management of business applications on-premise or in the cloud, on any platform or device, to any data source, with enhanced performance, minimal IT complexity and low total cost of ownership.

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