



Streamlight, Inc. is recognized around the world as the leading provider of premium portable lighting solutions. The company is focused on developing and distributing advanced lighting solutions based upon its extensive, continuing research into lighting challenges that have yet to be addressed. The company's products are distributed in over 60 countries. The company makes it a point to get out in the field and talk with its customers. Focus groups help identify lighting problems that the company should address. Since the most extreme hazardous conditions are found in dark places, Streamlight has created a complete line of products safe to use even around potentially explosive atmospheres. How the lights are mounted is another important consideration – hand-held, fixed to the person or equipment. And how the light is directed is also an important consideration. Flexible stalks and adjustable headlamps are examples. Streamlight warrants its products to be free of defects, even including the LED light source, for a lifetime of use.

Mike Zahner, Director of Streamlight's IT group, was tasked in 2009 to lead a renaissance in productivity at the company. With a rapidly expanding product line and customers often clamoring for order status, the company's entire information flow came under heavy pressure and scrutiny. Their "tried and true" paper-based system was by then tired and not necessarily true. A growing portion of everyone's time was spent scrambling for status information to optimize throughput and offer better performance on customer orders and inquiries. Some things needed to change, some interdepartmental boundaries needed to be eliminated, for the company to achieve its ambitious growth objectives.

"We had grown in size and complexity over the years until our system was generating 30 thousand pieces of paper per month, just for our manufacturing process. We had to move from this 'paper pyramid' to faster, easier, more reliable automated processes to continue to grow and also to improve our customer service," states Zahner. "We needed to make the conversion without a hitch. Some of our biggest challenges were in receiving, putaway, and picking for production. We wrote up our initial specifications and presented these to a short list of potential vendors. After careful consideration, we chose Epicor for what they had then, and what they promised for the near-term future."

Zahner adds "Our company is recognized for superior technology and superlative packaging of our solutions into durable, capable products that fulfill their functions and last for many years. We are constantly challenged to tune our business systems to achieve the same level of performance and durability. We're getting close, now, with our automated systems replacing paper at virtually every stage of operations. Streamlight is world class, outside and in."

Change Orders were a source of a lot of overhead and exasperation. Real-time order status was, while not impossible, was costly and disruptive to obtain. Physical inventory counts took 3-4 days and, at the same time, interrupted manufacturing.

"Scheduling was being done by people too far removed from actual operations, so we determined to push scheduling to as close to the specific operation as possible. Our Cross-functional Continuous Improvement Team studied factory workflow, layout and processes to determine how to optimize inventory and production," says Zahner.



IMPLEMENTATION HIGHLIGHTS

- Cut year-end inventory reconciliation from 4 to 2 days with total confidence in numbers
- Scheduling pushed down to lowest level
- Priorities set on screen, BOM on screen, all labels bar-coded, inventory constantly updated and numbers can be relied upon
- Reduced paperwork by 85-90%
- By Day 3 of implementation, achieved level of previous daily shipments
- By Day 4, scaled up to throughput only had only been achieved before with overtime
- Soon thereafter, shipped 1.3X their previous largest day – and still increasing from there
- Used to be shipments just twice per day, now continuous
- Customers get instant feedback on order status
- Accountability is complete and seamless, with identification of specific individuals responsible for every step along the way
- Give people opportunity to really CONTRIBUTE versus the old ways of measuring value by effectiveness of scrambling to make up for systemic blockages
- Now have SOPs for everything and everyone – ISO 9001 certified – conversion complete to Real from “Tribal” knowledge
- Now have a modern, electronic process that can be built upon, improved and changed

“We previously relied on paper work orders once a sales order was generated, each of which had to be hand delivered to a production cell,” says Bryan Troxel, Streamlight’s Plant Manager. “Once the order was fulfilled at the cell, production then had to walk the work order to shipping, along with ‘work in process’ paperwork. If an order needed to be traced, production would need to sift through piles of job orders.” As a result, it was difficult to give customers real-time information about the status of their orders. Now, said Troxel, “work orders are generated and tracked using a secure web portal. The system traces orders as they move through stages in manufacturing, with touch screens at production cells enabling employees to provide updates about orders’ status as these are completed and sent to shipping. The automated process also constantly updates time-to-completion estimated until the finished goods are shipped to the customer. This enables Streamlight to share delivery projections of customer orders and WIP information in real-time.”

Troxel also noted that the company is equipping warehouse ‘pickers’ with hand-held scanning devices as a faster, more accurate method for picking the parts necessary to fulfill a customer request. Transactions are now entered in real-time from anywhere on the plant floor, resulting in faster, more accurate input of production and inventory changes and leading to faster customer order fulfillment. “All of the process improvements we have implemented are designed to maximize our supply chain efficiency while improving customer satisfaction,” noted Troxel. “The Continuous Improvement Team will continue to look for ways to automate our systems and processes so we can not only meet but exceed customers’ expectations.”

Zahner adds “We worked very hard for years to achieve our position of leadership in the industry, based upon our innovative, durable product designs, made of quality materials, guaranteed for life. Wouldn’t it have been a shame to have come so far only to be defeated by antiquated infrastructure? We are now ‘world class,’ both inside and out. And we have the foundation for decades of continuing growth. And that’s clearly a reflection on the company we keep. MSC with its advanced data collection solutions and deep domain expertise in our kind of business, is just the partner we needed. Thanks for the help – we’ll take it from here!”

