

Automation Plus, Inc. Tailors Stewart Sutherland's Systems To A Tee



Issues that Led to New System

- Intense, complex payroll processing
- Capture historical material usage data
- Access to customer data
- Manual manufacturing processes
- Inventory control to produce accurate bill of materials

Results Achieved Working with Automation Plus, Inc.

- Reduced time to process weekly payroll by 75%
- Reduced payroll process errors from 5-10% to zero
- Improved employee morale
- Analyzed trends to make better purchasing decisions
- Access to customer data
- Automated quote-to-order process
- Sales forecasts are more accurate

French Fries. Pizza. Subs. Burritos. Ever wonder what keeps them all together? It's in the bag. Stewart Sutherland has been manufacturing and supplying bags and wraps for hundreds of customers throughout the U.S. since 1959. From their Vicksburg, MI manufacturing plant staffed with 110 employees, Stewart Sutherland manufacturers both stock and custom bags.

After a feasibility study analyzing their current applications was conducted, it was determined that a new system should be put in place to improve efficiencies and enable growth. The current software was limiting in its manufacturing and customization capabilities. Anne Liggett, controller, met with Automation Plus, Inc., a local professional services firm specializing in Sage Pro and TIW. "Both Sage Pro and TIW would work well for us," said Anne Liggett, Stewart Sutherland's controller for 15 years. "However, it was Automation Plus, Inc. who would make it work perfectly for us."

As a union shop, Stewart Sutherland's payroll process was extremely complex. There were many variables that needed to be tracked to be in compliance with current union contracts. The weekly payroll took two full-time employees, two days each week to process. "Different jobs pay a different rate," said Anne. "In order to

process payroll correctly, we had to match the employee's time clock punches with the schedule so we knew which rate to pay the employee based on the job that was worked on." Not only

was this time consuming, but data entry errors were made. Working closely with Automation Plus, Inc., the entire logic of the payroll process was analyzed in order to automate a significant amount of processing payroll.

Employees now clock in using a bar coded time card. These entries are then automatically matched up with the week's schedule so employees are paid according to the job that they are scheduled for. "Now we only have to deal with exceptions or possible schedule changes, which the system provides for us," said Anne. "We have saved an incredible amount of time and money. Our payroll now takes just one person, one day to complete," said Anne. "Since the payroll was automated, we have reduced the number of errors from 5-10% each week to none. All 110 of our employees receive their paychecks on time and they are accurate. This goes a long way in terms of employee morale."

Payroll was not the only area to receive an upgrade to efficiency. "Before we implemented TIW, we used these enormous black ledger books to track how much of the various materials we kept on hand and how much we used for each job," said Anne. "While what we were tracking was pretty straightforward, it was the fact that we tracked more than 250 different types of paper in this manner that became problematic."

Once Automation Plus, Inc. had implemented TIW and trained Stewart Sutherland to use the system, Anne again saw an



"Automation Plus, Inc. is quick to respond to any situation we have. Their service is above and beyond what you would expect."

— Anne Liggett, Controller

increase in accuracy and efficiency. One of the most significant benefits of automating the manufacturing area was the ability Anne now has to analyze history and track trends. "Previously, if I wanted to pull any historical information, I would have to sit down with a pencil, adding machine and those huge ledger books. I looked like someone out of Dickens' A Christmas Carol," said Anne. "Now I can simply print a report to show me how much of a particular product we have used in the past." This helps Stewart Sutherland make better buying decisions. "When you use the quantity of paper that we use, you become very aware of costs. Having the historical trend data allows us to evaluate if we should buy more of a particular type of paper or foil based on current pulp and aluminum prices. Our purchasing forecasts are much more accurate," said Anne.

Every new item produced is assigned a product number. TIW helps Stewart Sutherland determine what machine the item should be produced on and how much paper or foil it will take. The order is opened in TIW and the job is run. The produced products are put in inventory as finished goods, which relieves raw materials and then the product shows up in Sage Pro ready to be sold.

Automation Plus, Inc. also has helped automate the sales team's quote-to-order process as well as give salespeople access to complete customer historical sales data. "When a salesperson connects to our network they are able to download a year's worth of customer sales history. They have all the customer information at their fingertips," said Anne. "Automation Plus, Inc. wrote a quote program to help determine the price to charge a customer based on criteria such as printing and size of bag or wrap. Once this information is entered, a

professional Word document is produced that can be sent to our customer for approval. These details are kept in the quote program. Often times the salespeople are in the field and instead of having to wait for the salesperson to process the quote to an order, we are able to do that for them." This allows customer orders to be processed more quickly.

On a quarterly basis Anne is able to review the quote-to-order conversion ratio. "I can look at any salesperson or broker and know precisely how many jobs they quoted in a period and how many became orders. Before the system we could not even guess what this would be," said Anne. This has improved the accuracy of sales forecasting, which ties into production needs and budgeting.

Automation Plus, Inc. has written smaller customizations for Stewart Sutherland as well that has made Anne's life easier. "One program they wrote for me will make global cost and pricing changes very quickly instead of manually changing the data," said Anne. "What I appreciate about Automation Plus, Inc. is that I can call and describe our situation to them and in a very short period of time they have a solution for me. Their technical expertise is phenomenal and the longevity of the employees there gives us a sense of continuity."

"I definitely appreciate Automation Plus, Inc.'s sensitivity to our budget. They are able to give me choices so we can decide what is best for our company," said Anne. "Their people really care about our success and are great to work with."



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