ASI
Encompix® ERP

Encompix ERP Handles ASI's Systems

Since 1972, Automatic Systems, Inc. (ASI), Kansas City, Missouri, has developed material handling systems that have helped revolutionize the way automotive equipment, farm machinery, fiberglass and appliances are designed and manufactured. In 1998 the company was sold to the Columbus McKinnon Corporation, a leading designer and manufacturer of material handling products, systems, and services. Four years later ASI returned to private hands after one of the former owners purchased the company. As a result, ASI knew they had to move from the proprietary Columbus McKinnon financial system.
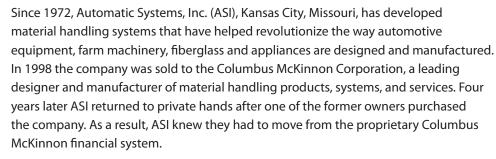
Although Columbus McKinnon would have allowed ASI to use their system for a year, the project team did not want to wait until the last minute. "We had up till May 2003, but we didn't want to wait that long," said Ed Meyer, CFO. "We started looking for a replacement system six months before the change of ownership with a planned implementation date of October 1, 2002 to coincide with ASI's new financial year."

"We had developed an in-house system to supplement the Columbus McKinnon financial system. This gave us an idea of what to look for," said George Martin, information technology manager. Based on that experience ASI wanted to narrow the list down as quickly as possible. "We evaluated 10 software suppliers and one of the things that weeded them out was the ability to meet our union payroll requirements," said Martin. "Another key requirement was to select a project-based, not product-based system. We wanted to streamline our operation and eliminate the redundancy between engineering, purchasing and accounting."

ASI Selects Encompix

In the summer of 2002 ASI selected Encompix. "Encompix is designed for project-based companies and worked just like the system we had written ourselves. Encompix was able to meet all our requirements. They also took the time to demonstrate how the software worked in environments like ours," said Martin.

"We wanted a system that was close to the way we worked. We realized that no package is going to fit exactly or do the same things as the old system. We felt that Encompix gave us more flexibility and was designed for ETO. That's what drove us to Encompix as everything we do is custom designed," added Meyer.

ASI implemented the full Encompix suite including: engineering, purchasing, materials management, shop floor control, and accounting in 90 days. Education and training continues to play a crucial role as more people use the system. "As far as how to use the software, that's easy. It's changing people's responsibilities and expectations that has been the hard thing," said Martin.

Fewer Mistakes, Greater Accuracy

A big problem for companies with "islands of automation" is the redundant data stored in multiple places and the non-value-added activities involved in maintenance.

"Encompix has enabled us to remove a lot of the redundant data. It's new for engineering as they now enter the data directly in the system. Before Encompix, engineering would create a drawing and pass it to someone else to enter the bills of material. They think it's more work for them, but the reality is that it has increased accuracy and eliminated data redundancy in other departments," said Meyer.

"Engineering has been able to break jobs down into much more detail than before. We now have some jobs that have hundreds of children below the parent. We just didn't have that amount of detail before. Now we can drill down and see the detail," added Meyer.

Benefits of Integration

Outside of the financial modules, ASI had no experience of integrated systems. "The thing we liked was that Encompix brought consistency into the way we worked. Now everyone is using the same data. Before Encompix some departments were using one system and others another system. Everyone had their own way of doing things. Now it forces everyone to operate in the same way. This is one of the bonuses for us," said Meyer.

Improved Visibility for Project Managers

As with all engineer-to-order companies, it is essential that the project manager can check and see how his job is progressing against the original estimate.

"The big improvement we've seen is in the area of job costing. In the past if a project manager wanted to see the costs on his job, he had to call accounting. Accounting then had to run a report and they had to determine what information was not included in the report. We don't have to worry about that any more. Now, because every project manager has access to Encompix, they can access the reports themselves. They don't have to wait for accounting; they can go into job costing and see exactly what has been posted," said Meyer.

IntelliTrak Joins Forces with ASI

In June 2005 ASI completed the purchase of OCS IntelliTrak, Inc. Headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio, OCS IntelliTrak designs and builds overhead conveyor systems. The IntelliTrak overhead conveyor system was developed in Sweden in the early 1970s. IntelliTrak has been manufacturing and selling IntelliTrak Overhead Conveyors in North America under an exclusive license agreement from OCS AB since 1994. Through numerous developments and enhancements, the products have evolved into the low cost, clean, quiet, modular, inherently safe alternative to traditional Power & Free Systems. IntelliTrak has provided a proven system in a number of manufacturing, finishing, order picking, and distribution facilities. It is truly unique in its ability to provide diverse, efficient, and cost-effective solutions to many material handling challenges.

IntelliTrak will still maintain its current operations in Cincinnati, Ohio, as well as retain its management structure. "This acquisition is a win/win for both ASI and IntelliTrak," states Charlie Tabler, President & CEO of IntelliTrak. "The partnership of the two organizations will allow both IntelliTrak and ASI to more fully penetrate Tier I suppliers to the automotive industry as well as provide a clean and quiet alternative system for lighter duty applications for parts delivery and assembly within automotive plants. We're all quite excited and optimistic about our future as a Material Handling solutions provider." Ed Meyer concurs. "There is great synergy between the two companies. IntelliTrak builds a product very similar to ASI only it is a light duty product, ASI's is a heavy duty product. Even our lightweight product would not allow ASI to compete effectively against other companies that build products similar to IntelliTrak. This allows us to compete in areas we couldn't even bid on before."

Two-Month Implementation

One of the first steps was to replace IntelliTrak's old financial accounting system, Peachtree, with Encompix. "IntelliTrak hadn't upgraded Peachtree for some time, so it made sense to implement Encompix, as I have to make sure I can present consolidated accounts to the Board," said Meyer.

IntelliTrak started with Encompix in June 2005 and two months later went live with the base components on August 1, 2005. Initially IntelliTrak has five users, but this will grow as more departments begin using Encompix.