



Case Study | Drake Extrusion Inc.

looksoftware's product suite helps extend the longevity of Drake's ERP system

▶ Critical issue

Software & systems outdated and incompatible with emerging technologies.

Paper-based information systems hindering make-to-order processes.

▶ Solution

New smartclient user interface.

Mobile, real-time systems access at production facility.

▶ Results

Streamlined business process.

High reuse of existing applications.

Improved product control.

Reduced operator training costs.

Background

Drake Extrusion Inc. operates out of its manufacturing and distribution facility in Martinsville, VA and is a wholly owned subsidiary of Chapelthorpe plc. Since being established in 1995, Drake has become a leading manufacturer and distributor of polypropylene fiber and yarn in North America. Drake's primary markets are the automotive, home furnishings, floor coverings and geotextile sectors. Currently, it has 170 employees operating the 24/7 facility.

Challenge

Drake has been using System/21 since 1997. After the push for Y2K compliance, the strategic decision was made to stabilize the ERP environment around the then current version of System/21. Users were very comfortable with the software's functionality, and in conjunction with some 'bolt on' solutions, it fulfilled most of the business's needs. Drake recognised however, that they were losing touch with emerging technologies, and wanted to modernize their applications to ensure that they would be able to take advantage of these technologies as needed, whilst maximizing the benefits of existing investment and skills.

Drake's initial challenge was to refocus its approach to supporting the manufacturing facility through its ERP system. While much of the day to day administration was well supported, much of the tools for providing and collecting data within the manufacturing environment were still paper based, and manually operated. This resulted in a level of inflexibility, as any planned changes in output would only be relayed to the manufacturing facility when paperwork was reconciled. This became increasingly unworkable, as the manufacturing facility operates on a make-to-order basis, and requires systems that are sufficiently responsive to complement this environment.

Drake decided that it wanted to provide an online system on the shop floor which would reflect any changes to schedules, work orders and materials in real time. Additionally, there needed to be a mechanism that allowed the shop floor to feed back data regarding set up and progress.

There was also a requirement to supplement the system with portable, touch screen tablets to provide the production area with instant access to required data, and with a facility to update the system. Traditional 5250 applications did not lend themselves fully to operating in a touch screen format however. Additionally, most shop floor users had not been exposed to 5250 applications, but were familiar with the Microsoft Windows environment.



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“Using the looksoftware suite of products has truly enabled us to extend the longevity of our ERP system and enhanced the way in which IT is able to deliver focused solutions.”

Ray Snell, Director of Information Systems and QMS Manager, Drake Extrusion Inc.

Any application had to play to the strengths of the users and preferred technology to ensure the success of any implementation.

Solution

After becoming aware of looksoftware’s solutions through one of our ISV partners, Drake explored the product further and discovered that looksoftware could provide them with a simple to use solution that would bridge the gap between the 5250 world and Windows. Ray Snell, Director of Information Systems, said “Although we looked at competing products, none could match the ease of use of looksoftware’s offerings. This was key to Drake as we did not want the cost and learning curve involved with re-skilling limited development resources.”

Drake initially used the newlook development tool to deliver effective user interfaces. The production elements of the ERP suite were refaced to improve the presentation and to extend functionality by introducing additional control mechanisms such as SPC charts. New functionality was developed for the shop floor to provide visibility of production schedules, work order recipes and process conditions. Data capture was also introduced to allow feedback regarding changing process conditions. By using newlook, the applications were transformed to provide point and click Windows applications that were both intuitive and easy to use.

Benefits

In terms of benefits, Ray commented, “Using newlook has significantly enhanced our ability to deliver modern and relevant applications within our business. By carefully identifying key work flows, we have been able to extend the reach of our ERP system into all areas of the business. Training times and learning curves have been significantly reduced when new functionality is introduced due to the familiar look and feel of the applications. The introduction of expanded shop floor functionality has had a direct impact in improving our ability to control product quality.”



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