

Wise Alloys: Becoming more responsive through efficient job tracking

Overview

■ Challenge

Wise Alloys wanted to improve productivity and speed customer service by modernizing an inefficient manual process.

■ Why Become an

On Demand Business?

To cut time and cost and become more responsive to customers.

■ Solution

An imaging solution that scans each lot ticket, stores the image and makes it available for immediate viewing online.

■ Key Benefits

- 100 percent ROI in under one month.
- Annual savings of US\$10-15,000.
- Reduced lot ticket handling from 3-4 weeks to one day.
- Fast lot ticket retrieval improves customer service and increases employee productivity.
- Faster identification of production problems.

» On Demand Business defined

An enterprise whose business processes – integrated end-to-end across the company and with key partners, suppliers and customers – can respond with speed to any customer demand, market opportunity or external threat.



Speeding a manual process

Muscle Shoals, Alabama-based Wise Alloys is in the business of providing the aluminum stock used to make cans and similar products. The company takes in 1,000 truck and rail-car shipments of recycled aluminum every month – representing 40 million pounds of used beverage cans – melts it down and casts it into ingots that are then rolled into enormous coils, or rolls, of fresh stock – alloyed, coated and rolled to customer specifications. Wise Alloys (www.wisealloys.com) has the ability to process 950 million pounds of aluminum per year.

“The whole system is just fantastic. It was affordable, easy to get up and running and is easy to operate. It lets us be a better supplier for our customers.”

– Gene Bendall, senior business systems analyst, Wise Alloys LLC

Enabling process transformation through open, standardized platforms

On Demand Business Benefits

- The solution paid for itself in less than one month.
- Elimination of external vendors saves between US\$10,000 and US\$15,000 per year.
- Lot ticket processing time has been cut from as much as four weeks down to one day.
- Online access of lot ticket images enables Wise to be more responsive to customer demand.
- Wise staff is no longer called on to hunt down paper job tickets, allowing them to be more productive.

This heavy industrial process is well established and has little room for improvement—it's an excellent example of the value of recycling in action. And like the remanufacturing process itself, the internal tracking of information associated with each job at the plant makes use of well-proven methods.

Each one of the enormous coils—weighing some 35,000 pounds on average—has a corresponding paper lot ticket that allows Wise to track quality control and manage production. The lot tickets, each with its own ticket number, contain information on customer specifications and sign-offs from factory employees as the metal moves through the remanufacturing process. Irregularities in the metal, when they occur, are noted on the ticket.

At the end of each day, the tickets are gathered and processed. In the past, this involved sending them offsite to have the ticket numbers keypunched by a third party vendor, then taken by courier to a microfiche service for filming and archiving. The keyed data was couriered back to Wise, where it was loaded into the company's back-office systems, running on an IBM **@server**® iSeries™ Model 520.

These tickets—some 40,000 per year—are the sole repository of detailed information about each coil that Wise produces. Should a customer have a question or concern, the standard practice was to retrieve the lot ticket to check the manufacturing history of the coil in question. In the case of current tickets, this meant physically sifting through stacks of paper; in the case of archived tickets, it involved sending out for the appropriate microfiche. This manual retrieval process, which could take a day in the case of tickets still at the plant or as much as three to four weeks for offsite records, kept Wise employees from doing more productive work and quickly responding to customer inquiries.

A streamlined, automated solution

When Wise became aware of the WebDocs™ imaging solution from IBM Business Partner RJS Software Systems (RJS), it saw the opportunity not only to make the ticket storage and retrieval process much more efficient, but also to reduce costs and improve its responsiveness to customers. The simple solution runs on their iSeries server, and incorporates a Fujitsu duplex scanner.

Now, the tickets are gathered at the end of the day and fed into the scanner in batches of 20 each night by Wise's medical staff, who typically have a low workload during the late shift and volunteered to take on this responsibility. The scanner rapidly images both sides of each ticket and stores the images in a database that is accessible via the Web, based on lot ticket number. The paper tickets are then destroyed—no storage is needed. The entire external process of couriering, keypunching and microfilming, along with its associated costs and time, has been eliminated.

With ticket images available online, viewable by any Web browser, Wise can be instantly responsive to customer queries. For example, Wise service representatives, who make routine periodic visits to customers, can call up the actual lot ticket from the customer's site at a moment's notice and quickly resolve any issues, such as product imperfections that may have been noted on the ticket during manufacturing. Wise will be keeping a year's worth of lot ticket data available for retrieval.

The solution has the ability to search data based on as many as ten key fields, making it very flexible. Wise has leveraged the system by using it for other purposes, such as capturing images of invoices and sales orders and information about electrical equipment at the plant.

Rapid implementation

"We looked into some other packages, but they were too expensive," says Gene Bendall, senior business systems analyst for Wise Alloys. "The vendors wanted two or three days on site to set up the system and train the staff, and a few thousand dollars a day. RJS had us up and running in literally two hours. They even set us up with a system that we could try for free for 30 days... all we had to do was supply the scanner. Overall, it was about half the cost of the alternatives."

The RJS solution that's being used at Wise is native to the iSeries server, which made implementation simple and inexpensive. RJS is also moving to open source, and will have both hybrid native/Java™ applications and pure Java applications available.

Key Components

Hardware

- IBM @server iSeries i5 520
- Fujitsu duplex scanner

Software

- RJS Software Systems WebDocs

Business Partner

- RJS Software Systems
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Bendall was pleased that Wise could make use of its existing IBM servers to run the solution. "We've been very happy with our iSeries system," he says. "We wanted to keep this as simple as possible, and we've been able to do that. The only piece of hardware we had to add was the scanner. I was skeptical at first, but the whole system is just fantastic. It was affordable, easy to get up and running and is easy to operate—the staff loves it. It lets us be a better supplier for our customers. It's a winning situation all the way around."

For more information

Please contact your IBM sales representative or IBM Business Partner.

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12-05
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