Walnut Creek Planing Ltd

From its 80,000-square-foot facility in Holmes County, Ohio, Walnut Creek Planing Ltd provides high-quality hardwood components and finished goods for the door, stair, furniture and butcher block industries. The majority of its products include everything from box newels and door stiles to fittings, mouldings, sheetgood parts, stair treads, and counter tops.

The Walnut Creek Planing's facility in Holmes Country, Ohio.

Walnut Creek Planing makes a wide variety of wood mouldings for home use.

Most of the wood used in the manufacturing process is cut at local sawmills within days of being harvested. The green lumber is then brought to Walnut Creek Planing's mill, sorted by grade, and air dried in the firm's state-of-the-art dry kiln facility. Located in the nearby town of Winesburg, the kiln can dry up to 300,000 board feet at a time. Once dry, the wood heads to the main facility, where five high-speed molders, three optimizing chop saws, three CNC routers (including a 5-axis machine) automated finger jointing equipment, and multiple sanders and shapers turn the wood into beautiful finished products.

The sophisticated tools in Walnut Creek Planing's production and dry kiln facilities allow them to control the manufacturing process from forest to final product. This enables them to cut costs and operate more efficiently while ensuring that every product has the highest level of quality and craftsmanship. But Walnut Creek Planing also uses another state-of-the-art tool to control workflow, cut costs and simplify the business: Global Shop Solutions ERP software.

Improved Visibility with ERP
Prior to going live with Global Shop Solutions ERP software in 2009, Walnut Creek Planing had been using an Access™ database coupled with various spreadsheets and other tools to manage the business. According to Chad Wengerd, the company's Information Technology Manager, this approach did not provide the tracking capabilities or visibility of information required to effectively run a high-volume shop floor.

Why choose Global Shop Solutions ERP software?

"Because it looked like the best all-around ERP software," explains Wengerd. "It did everything we wanted in an ERP software package, from scheduling to production management, inventory to accounting. It also gave us the visibility throughout the shop floor that we need to manage the business more efficiently."

Implementing Global Shop Solutions ERP software produced several immediate benefits for Walnut Creek Planing, including reduced inventory costs and the ability to track jobs at every point in the production process. In particular, the Advanced Planning & Scheduling (APS) module helped to simplify scheduling by allowing the dispatch list to be automatically deployed - a huge time saver for workstations running many different jobs every day.

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"We run a shop floor that's focused on team leadership and working as a team to increase productivity," says Wengerd. "With our old system, it was virtually impossible for our plant manager to manage 25 workstations and all the manufacturing steps and materials that needed to be scheduled without overlooking an order or missing something else. Needless to say, this made for an inefficient workflow."

"APS lets us schedule every job down to the exact minute," he continues. "With their workflow automatically organized, the team leader at each workcenter simply selects the job off the top of the dispatch list. This makes it easy to identify which jobs have the highest priority, and the team leader just goes down the list in order."

Robust Tracking Capabilities

One of the best features of Global Shop Solutions ERP software is that it gives manufacturing companies the ability to track data in ways they always wanted to but were unable to do with their old systems. For Walnut Creek Planing, this includes the ability to accurately track sales order history, customer quotes, and other key data.

With a catalog of several thousand different parts, Walnut Creek Planing needs to know which parts are generating the highest volume and which are moving the fastest. Global Shop Solutions ERP software lets management quickly track the sales order history for every part in the plant. It also makes it easy to compare estimated versus actual costs, a key component in quoting accurate prices to customers while ensuring that each job turns a profit.

In addition,the live inventory tracking has significantly simplified the movement of parts and materials throughout the busy warehouse.

"We used to have difficulty keeping track of where inventory was stored, especially in the middle of a demanding manufacturing process," says Wengerd. "Our forklift drivers would go to pull a particular part only to find that it had already been used or moved to another location. Which meant they had to spend time tracking it down in the warehouse or finding a material substitution that was not filling another requirement."

Walnut Creek Planing uses handheld scanners for live inventory tracking.

"With Global Shop Solutions' bin-to-bin tracking, we know exactly where every piece of material is 100% of the time," he says. "With live inventory transactions, forklift operators can see actual on-hand inventory numbers and location on the go. Whenever someone moves a pallet of material, with several barcode scans they print a bin-to-bin ticket from the wireless printer installed on their forklift and attach it to the pallet. The next time an operator needs that pallet, they access the inventory record in Global Shop Solutions and instantly know where to find it. That's a huge time saver!"

Paperless Shop Floor

With the help of 18 Shop Floor Data Collection stations and GS Mobile, Walnut Creek Planing has gone totally paperless on the shop floor. The only paper still in use is the 4" x 6" barcoded labels affixed to lumber and raw materials for tracking purposes.

The Shop Floor Data Collection stations allow operators to electronically log on and off jobs, which eliminates written time sheets. They automatically deliver work orders, routers and dispatch lists to each workstation. And they provide critical job information by automatically linking drawings, job specs, and other documents through the Document Control™ application. Shop floor personnel no longer waste time trying to track down information for each job. And the information they get through the Shop Floor Data Collection stations are always accurate and up to date.

"Thanks to Global Shop Solutions, we now have a wealth of information on the shop floor without a wealth of paperwork following it around," says Wengerd. "Everyone loves it!"

Of the many ERP software's mobile application features that Walnut Creek Planing uses, electronic purchase order receipt has had a big impact. When lumber and other materials arrive for delivery, the worker enters the PO number and the amount being received into the scanner, and Global Shop Solutions ERP software automatically receives the material into inventory and generates an inventory label, which is printed to the wireless forklift printer. The forklift driver then places it on the material. In a matter of seconds, the material is received and ready to proceed directly to a workstation or the warehouse.

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"When we get a rush order, the ability to immediately receive materials into inventory so people can work on them as quickly as possible is critical," explains Wengerd. "It used to be that on busy days it could take hours to receive materials into our system and make them available for jobs. With Global Shop Solutions, we receive materials into inventory as they're being unloaded from the truck."

Customizable Software

As head of IT, Wengerd appreciates Global Shop Solution ERP software's robust database architecture and reliable performance. He also likes the fact that it can be easily customized to fit Walnut Creek Planing's operating environment. Using the Global Application Builder (GAB), Wengerd has created a number of custom scripts and programs to make small manual processes more efficient.

"I like GAB because you don't need an extensive programming background to do some nifty things with it," he says. "You can learn most of what you need through the help menu and GAB forum, but if you need a hand the folks at Global Shop Solutions are happy to help. You can also look at scripts that Global Shop Solutions has created and use their code or the same concept to perform the task in your own script. Once you get the basics, it's fairly simple."

An assortment of Walnut Creek Planing's quality hand rail pieces.

For example, with some assistance from a Global Shop Solutions Consultant, Wengerd created a wireless ticket script. When team leaders on the floor clock in on an order, the system gives them an opportunity to create a pick ticket for the material on that order. If they choose to create a pick ticket, it identifies the amount of material they will need, which workcenter is requiring the material, and where it is stored in inventory in the warehouse. The operator identifies the forklift responsible for their workcenter, hits the print button, and prints the ticket to the wireless label printer on that forklift. The forklift driver instantly has the ticket in hand, and can pull and deliver the material to the workstation in a matter of minutes.

"I can't tell you how much the wireless pick ticket has simplified our workflow," says Wengerd. "It was a real home run for us!"

Wengerd also picked up a handy e-invoicing script from the GAB forum and modified it slightly. Now, when the accounts receivable person processes the invoice batch, Global Shop Solutions ERP software sends each customer an email with a .pdf file of the invoice attached. When customers read the invoice, Walnut Creek Planing automatically gets a receipt telling them the customer has read it.

"This eliminates the time required to invoice customers manually and send them out via fax, email, or even snail mail," says Wengerd. "We can email our invoices while we update the invoice batch, without anyone having to do anything else. It's a small feature but a real time saver."

A Powerful Competitive Tool

At Walnut Creek Planing, enthusiasm for Global Shop Solutions ERP software extends beyond the shop floor and into the administrative offices, where the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) module is a big hit with office personnel.

When a customer calls in, customer service reps can access the customer's entire company information - including contact information, sales order history, work order history, and open work orders - with only a few keystrokes. They can instantly let customers the status of their orders, including up-to-the-minute estimates for completion and shipping. And on those rare occasions when a job gets delayed, they can tell customers why it's late and when they can expect to receive it.

"Customers really like it when they can get all that information in one quick phone call," notes Wengerd. "And we don't have to waste time tracking down information and then calling the customer back. It's the type of informative, friendly customer service that I would like every company to have."

Where has Global Shop Solutions ERP software made the biggest difference?

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"For the company as a whole, I would say organizing and managing workflow," says Wengerd, "keeping everything flowing smoothly and efficiently from one workcenter to the next. Global Shop Solutions has also helped us decrease lead times, so we can have much quicker turnaround times. Whether someone places a custom order or an unusually large order, we can immediately see the estimated loads for each workcenter, allowing us to give the customer a quicker and more accurate lead time."

"From my perspective as IT manager, the ability to customize the software is critical," he concludes. "If Global Shop Solutions can't do something we need it to do out of the box, there's a very good chance that we can do something with GAB to make that process more user friendly and more efficient. Global Shop Solutions lets you turn slow, inefficient and expensive manual processes into partially or fully automated processes that save time and money. In today's competitive manufacturing environment, that's a powerful tool to have on your side."

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