User experience of production control/ERP systems

Leicester, UK-based investment foundry, Lestercast Ltd discusses the benefits of using a Synchro32 fully integrated business/production control/ERP system to control operations and provide instant reports on key management data.

Chris Batty and Malcolm Healey purchased Lestercast Ltd in September 2001, at which time the company was turning over around £1 million and only had one PC, with all production, quality and sales functions carried out manually. The organisation has expanded every year since and in 2008, turned over £7.4 million. According to Chris Batty, this could only have been achieved by using a fully integrated business/production control/ERP system such as Synchro32 to control operations and provide instant reports on key management data.

Chris Batty (left) and Malcolm Healey purchased Lestercast in 2001

"One of the fist things we did on purchasing the company was to contact Synchro and talk through our requirements" comments the Leicester-based company's Managing Director. He believes they should be able to run a company on a standard system and be able to access all relevant data by direct access or reports. "This is where the Synchro32 system scores highly" he observes. "I am a production engineer and not a 'techy', so I don't want me or anyone else at our company having to 'fiddle' with the main programming. As I have found in the past, if you have IT guys playing with the programming, that's when you get problems."

Fully integrated system

The standard Synchro32 system was installed on a networked system, with one of the computers acting as a server. Lestercast started off with eight screens on the system but over a number of years, the system has developed to include 16 terminals and a separate specialised server. The software, however, is still basically the same. Because the system is fully integrated, the company is able to run everything from the first enquiry and quotation, through order placement and all quality requirements; Lestercast is ISO 9001-2000 and TS 16949 approved, so works to high quality requirements, both on the parts manufactured and also with its internal systems.

The machines are capacity planned on the system, acknowledgements are sent automatically through a fax machine and parts are scheduled into the build programme. The system produces the production sheets on coloured card; these are also printed with a bar code to be used for booking and data acquisition during actual manufacture. Flat screen TVs are installed in each department and by scanning the bar code, a picture or video will appear on the screen, with instructions on how to process the part in that department. This add-on system was overseen by Synchro32 engineers and is considered very useful, while improving customer perceptions.

All quality control requirements are held on the system and reports are generated by various engineers and managers, as required. A key part of the system is that it uses Crystal Reports to generate all required reports. Initially, the main reports were produced by Synchro but subsequently, Lestercast personnel have been trained on Crystal Reports and can produce their own requirements easily, without having to touch the main software data.

The main system feeds out to Sage for the company's financial requirements, so the whole business is really integrated with the Synchro32 package.

On-time delivery priority

According to Chris Batty, one of Lestercast's main priorities is on-time delivery and the company is able to monitor this very easily using Crystal Reports, ensuring that targets are achieved more than 95% of the time.

"The main reasons why we use this system instead of others are that it is totally flexible, the Synchro personnel are easy to communicate with and are very conversant with both their system and also the foundry process (which is really important) and if we have a problem, they can access our system remotely and resolve it without affecting the normal daily business" suggests Mr Batty.
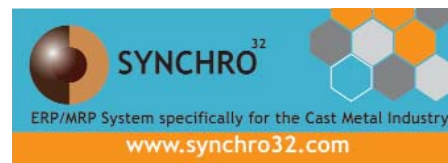
Lestercast relies heavily on the Synchro32 system to control a growing business and at various times, has needed additional support that was not available at the time. "We have always found the Synchro team to be positive in their approach and once the additional application has been added, this will become part of the standard system, which all regular users will receive as part of their regular update. We are a small, privately owned investment foundry and need a system that is easy to use but gives us cost-effective and accurate information - and that's what we get from Synchro."

Synchro: Relentless in the pursuit of excellence

Lestercast Ltd is a prime example of an ailing company, purchased by a couple of experienced engineers with a vision. Synchro was at the inception of this buyout and as Chris Batty and Malcolm Healey wanted to concentrate their total effort and experience on growing and expanding Lestercast Ltd, they approached UK-based Synchro to install, integrate and support the Synchro32 software system.

Synchro creates partnership/relationships. In the company's view, this is an absolutely critical factor in the success of customers and its own software. Customers need to trust Synchro to be there to do whatever it takes on an ongoing basis to travel the winding journey of growth and success. The company works continuously with all customer requirements and ideas in order to enable the pursuit of their goals.

At Lestercast, suggests Synchro, they work hard and their commitment to expansion is borne out by the steady and continued growth every year since the buyout; a great example of forward, proactive management.

According to the specialist ERP software supplier, success requires numerous elements, notably a hunger to get to the top of the game, recognising internal limitations and using external resource when expertise is a necessary requirement to that end. Synchro hungers for the same. To provide an exceptional system, specific to the cast metal industry, with a team of experts who have the knowledge and capability to provide users with the edge over their competition. The company's commitment is to continually improve and upgrade in response to the industry's needs.