

Painting Themselves Out of a Corner

Seymour of Sycamore Paints manufactures reliable and environmentally-friendly paint products for use in the automotive, industrial, hardware, specialty and marine industries by professional painters and do-it-yourselfers. Seymour's® corporate headquarters and 220,000 square feet of manufacturing facilities are located in Sycamore, Illinois.

Ric Vasquez, IT coordinator for Seymour of Sycamore Paints, came on board in 2014. On his first day, the company was going live with its new ERP system. And the company had challenges.

"I had to learn the company pretty fast on that 12-hour day," he said. "One of the things I noticed right away was that we were pretty outdated. We had an urgent need to move from a manually-operated company to an automated one."

/ CHALLENGE

Seymour was basically running its inventory management and shipping operations off "an index card system." Vasquez was looking to move the organization to a "pick and ship system."

"We had problems picking wrong product because we utilized a very manual, paper-based system back then," Vasquez explained. "In a manual system, there is always a greater risk of human error. Paperwork could be wrong or misread. Inventory misplaced or difficult to find. That can lead to someone picking a Ford Green instead of Schlumberger Blue. And, that means the wrong product is selected which can lead to a huge loss of money, product waste and disposal issues."



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/ SOLUTION

Seymour worked with Paper-Less to create an automated program utilizing Paper-Less' pick-to-ship package. We worked closely with Tony Fleischman and Ryan Freitag to arm our people with both the hardware and software they needed to be more accurate and efficient in the picking process.

"Basically, we set our guys up with hand scanners and tablets. We made the process really very simple for them – and practically error free," Vasquez said. "The worker scans the pick list. That generates a screen that provides choices. Then the worker scans the item they need. The system confirms they have chosen the right item. They pick product and move on to the next task. If they somehow pick Yellow 101 and were supposed to grab Yellow 102, the scanner beeps to alert the operator to the mistake."

So, how did Seymour implement the solution?

Vasquez started out by talking to personnel in different roles from shipping manager all the way through to pickers themselves. "We identified the processes we had in place," Vasquez said. "Using that background, we put a game plan in place that would change our structure. We drafted it out on a board and brought everyone in. Gave them a chance to give their input. We went through multiple rounds of edits."

Paper-Less assisted in auditing the processes and helping develop potential solutions that would lead to a recommended next step.

"Once we had that proposal in place, we had everyone in the company represented in the finalization of our plan," Vasquez explained.

Seymour restructured its operations, implementing an MES system with Paper-Less. Testing scores of scenarios. And, finally, went live a year after its first whiteboard sessions.

Vasquez credits Paper-Less with its support from auditing assistance, creating ideas for potential solutions through testing to the ultimate launch.

"They were very helpful in bringing a fresh perspective. They had solutions that worked in other instances we could leverage into our thinking," Vasquez said. "It is a relationship that still works for us today."

/ RESULTS

"While we are still a very paper-based operation, we definitely use a lot less paper because of our work with Paper-Less. Their systems. Our relationship with the people. These are very critical to us transitioning to a more automated culture. It reduces errors and increases efficiencies. Overall, we are just better at quicker, more accurate order turnaround," Vasquez said.

He added that Paper-Less has become so ingrained in the company's system, he knows about as much about the product as anyone. "They call me Mr. Paper-Less around here," he said. "Thanks to the support we get. The way Paper-Less approaches a business relationship. We know this product very well. We understand exactly how it fits what we do and what the potential is to even further improve our operations."

Vasquez says the results bear out in the company's statistics:

-  **Greatly reduced product returns.**
-  **Readily identified and cleaned up 50% of expiring paint supplies before they expired.**
-  **Improved pick time efficiencies.**