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Materials software cuts lead times by up to a fifth

Freeman & Proctor manufactures customised pipe assemblies for the automotive and aerospace markets. The company's MRP system, designed to calculate the company's on-going requirements for raw materials, was beginning to show its age - so the race was on to source a cost-effective upgrade

Based in the English West Midlands town of Nuneaton, Freeman & Proctor produces bespoke tube and pipe for customers such as Rolls Royce, Bentley, Aston Martin and Prodrive. With many orders requiring quick turnaround, the reliability of Freeman & Proctor's MRP system is vital if raw materials are to be ordered in a timely manner to complete such work.

However, the existing MRP system was beginning to prove difficult when engineers needed to extract data for reporting purposes. So Freeman & Proctor decided to upgrade.

On contacting its vendor, the company discovered that simply updating to the latest version would cost upwards of £30,000 (€50,000) so it decided to investigate alternatives.

Freeman & Proctor's commercial manager, Phil Boffin, picks up the story: "123MRP was the first system we looked at - it did everything we wanted and there was no massive up-front cost. The speed at which we were able to implement the system ourselves was impressive - we were live in (less than) four weeks."

The 123MRP system is supplied on a rental basis, from Rent IT Systems for £1,240 per month for up to 28 users.

When working with industries such as aerospace, traceability is paramount. Freeman & Proctor holds both ISO9000 and several manufacturer accreditations. To maintain these, it previously had to embark on a time-consuming tracking process.

Mr Boffin expands: "To trace across batches we used a hand-written system of job cards and quality control cards. As an example, an Aston Martin two-strut set might consist of 24 parts. Each part would have its

own job card, which on the reverse would have batch traceability details logged. In turn, the quality control card would carry information relating to all part job cards.

"123MRP's picking list contains all of this information. We are currently writing reports to produce labels to replace the manual processes and I expect to reduce the average picking process for an order of this type from 20-30 minutes to less than five."

The potential for error has also been greatly reduced. Phil Boffin says: "The old system was quite forgiving when you were entering data. However, this would have a rather unforgiving knock-on effect. For example, it was easy to end up in a negative stock situation, which would only be discovered a month later, taking hours to resolve.

"123MRP enforces data integrity up front to ensure that you enter information correctly the first time. It is intuitive in the way that you enter data - it follows a logical flow, especially with the wizards and shortcuts which accelerate inputting of data. This is especially important for customers' schedules, whose volatility in terms of complexity and lead times have increased dramatically. They can span a year or more, where virtually every line item can change from month to month."

The 123MRP system has cut lead-times throughout all departments; from order entry and planning, through to dispatch and invoicing.

Mr Boffin points out: "Previously, one dispatch note would require one invoice. If we take the rollover kit for the World Rally Car, which comprises 60 items, this might be delivered in several drops - with 123MRP this can appear on a single invoice. As a result, we are generating at least 100 invoices less per month.

"With data entry across all departments also seeing improvements of around 50 per cent, this is saving us several man-hours in each department per month. All of these savings have a positive knock-on effect and we estimate we will see overall lead-time reductions of between 10 and 20 per cent."

Report writing - the reason the MRP was changed in the first place - is now easier and more flexible. Under the old system, report writing had become a time-consuming and cumbersome process, requiring complicated macros to be written to link back to MRP to obtain new data. 123MRP now allows dynamic manipulation of data in real-time.

Phil Boffin concludes: "For us, the flexibility of the reporting was a key factor in the decision to choose 123MRP. Demands change as to what we want to see daily and we can now easily work with live data. There are many reports we can do now that we couldn't before, and we are still learning the depths of how far we can analyze data."



Rent-IT Systems (UK)
Tel: +44 23 8086 1003
info@rent-it-systems.com
www.rent-it-systems.com

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