

## Swanson Transitions From Pen-to-Paper To MES



Factivity fit Swanson Industries with its shop floor technology in August 2008—replacing pen-to-paper with a PC-based manufacturing execution system (MES). The transition proved easy company-wide; operators and top tier management are now equipped with real time business information to make informed decisions while jobs are on the line.

Installation, while coupled with QAD, followed Swanson landing a contract from a global supplier of heavy construction machinery to manufacture hydraulic cylinders.

“In order to exceed expectations, we knew we needed a new software system, and one that gave us more control of parts as they moved through the factory,” says Howard Nelson, CFO. Swanson Industries, Inc., based in Morgantown, WV, is an industry leader in the manufacture and remanufacture of parts for the fluid power industry, as well as mining and construction.

While QAD replaced the legacy software system—aligning all business processes, including shop floor time reporting and production—it did not provide the necessary visibility of the line, to schedule and track orders, and monitor machines and time and attendance. Cleveland-based Factivity was contracted to provide this (secondary, but) necessary component—and integrate it with QAD.

“Having complete visibility of the floor activities is important to us,” says Nelson.

The install of Factivity, however, did not go without reservation from the line. “Many of our operators were more comfortable with putting pen to paper, than using a PC,” says John Godwin, Operations Manager, Swanson Plating Company, a subsidiary of Swanson Industries.

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Despite their fear, Factivity successfully had Swanson's over 150 machine operators up and running comfortably on the system on day one. "We held initial training sessions and retrained anyone who felt they needed it," says John Leibert, President, Factivity. "It's a touch screen system with color coded icons and large graphics, so it's designed for ease of use, at any skill level."

Shortly after the installation, Godwin and his operations team were wowed by the system. "It's like we went from the dark ages to world class manufacturing," he says.

For the first time, data was being collected real time at multiple points of production, and management was able to view it now, not two days from now. Also, it was possible for operators to view prints on the data collection PCs instead of using print books that have potential of outdated information. More importantly, Factivity provided a solution to meet a requirement from Swanson's largest customer to provide lot tracking.

Labor reporting, for example, had previously been recorded on paper by the operator, and then passed on to a data entry specialist who would type the information into the system—oftentimes days later. "This wasn't an entirely error-proof system," says Godwin. There was potential for error when the information was written down and when it was keyed.

Today, all is monitored machine-side, using Factivity's software on touch screen PCs. "We know exactly where an operator is on a job, and we know exactly where the parts are," says Godwin.

Because of job sequencing, operators are able to make informed decisions about what happens next on the line too. A job designated as "hot" shows in red on the Factivity screens. "They know what's priority and what's not," says Godwin.

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The Factivity software was modified to include a reject button. “We needed to be able to back a part up on the line if it required additional labor,” Godwin says. Before the Factivity software modification, when a part went down the line, an operator could not go back and make a change either to the work order or part. It required supervisor intervention. Today, both are possible and the change is communicated to the appropriate departments. Another benefit of the technology is accountability. Because each operator is assigned a pass code, management is able to monitor their performance throughout the day. “We’re able to identify problem areas and address them quickly. The continuing education of our line operators is important and key to our ongoing success,” says Godwin.

It is a form of quality control too: “If a rod is machined improperly and ultimately shipped to a customer and rejected, we can go back and see where and on whose watch this happened,” says Godwin, “and prevent it from happening again.”

A year later, one of the biggest benefits of Factivity is a 28.6 percent reduction in Work In Process inventory on Swanson’s shop floor. In addition, Factivity contributed to an increase of on time shipments and a substantial reduction of past due orders.

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