



HOLLAND CO. INCREASES PRODUCTIVITY, GOES WIRELESS

Companies like Holland that both manufacture a product and maintain field service or construction operations face unique business and information technology challenges and have a very limited number of choices for comprehensive enterprise software.

UNIQUE CHALLENGES

“Until we found IFS, we couldn’t find one company that had the service management piece, the engineering piece, the distribution piece and the general ledger piece in one package,” Jim Tieri, Director of Information Technology, Holland Co. said. “Our company is really unique in that we have several very distinct business units inside our company. You have the engineering and the shop order component, and inventory and purchasing combined with that. And then there are two different service businesses that get paid for executing contracts. We also engineer and build parts and sell them, so we need customer order entry, distribution and inventory functions that support that—and we can address them all of this from within IFS Applications™.”

IFS APPLICATIONS FACILITATED GROWTH

Holland has been live on IFS Applications since 2001. Implementation, accomplished in less than a year, on-time and under budget, was simple and straightforward. Shortly thereafter, Holland experienced substantial rapid growth.

“Since we went live on IFS Applications, company revenues have more than tripled,” Tieri said. “While I wouldn’t say there was direct causation, the timing was right. Had we not done it when we did it, it would have been a lot more cumbersome for us to grow at the rate that we have.”

According to Tieri, IFS Applications eased the way for growth in two ways—allowing more rapid fabrication of the company’s line of heavy equipment and automating the activities of field service crews.

Tieri said, “We build our own welding vehicles and sell similar equipment for rail welding around the world. It is a serious piece of railroad equipment—a huge generator, a welder head, and lots of steel. Our ability to shrink down the build cycle from six months for a single piece of equipment to building several at a time over a shorter period has been a major benefit we have gotten from the software.”

PRODUCTIVITY IN THE FIELD

In the field, Tieri rolled out handhelds to mobile welding technicians. “The field production reporting process was always very manual,” Tieri said. “These guys in the field are tracking and reporting business metrics on the number of welds made, welds missed, and consumables like grinding wheels they use. This is crucial information for us because on the back end in IFS Applications, we want current information on our productivity, and the ability to bill the customer in a more timely fashion. All this used to be a manual process, which was not so bad when we had eight trucks. But we will be at 75-plus vehicles next year.”

Tieri credits the open architecture of IFS Applications with allowing his team to easily integrate a custom application, which resulted in a simplified tool set for workers in the field and accurate, real-time information for Holland’s accounting and project management teams.

ABOUT HOLLAND COMPANY

Crete, Ill.-based (U.S.A.) Holland Co. is the world leader in flash-butt welding in railroad applications. In addition to full-service mobile, fixed plant and containerized welding, Holland also builds rail equipment, performs track testing, cleans and repairs railcars and designs and operates transloading pods, manufactures components for railcars, and more.

“The openness of IFS Applications’ architecture did allow us to not use standard functionality for entering data on handhelds—that’s all nice and well, but the thing that I think is much more remarkable is that we were able to have a programmer write a customer application on a Windows mobile device that was tailored to how our guy in the field does business every day and allows him to enter information without worrying about all the other stuff on that IFS Applications work order,” Tieri said. “And because of the open architecture of IFS Applications, we were then able to dump that data into the IFS work order, through the business logic and all the editing so the data goes in clean. And we can still track that activity through IFS/Work Order.”

“We took a guy on his truck who was hand-writing notes on production, delays, time spent on-track and off-track and moved him onto a PC-based process,” Tieri said. “With these handhelds, our mobile operators can simply report ‘I made a weld,’ ‘I missed a weld,’ ‘I used this grinding wheel.’ That data is uploaded at the end of the day right into IFS Applications—and that has reduced the cycle time of getting a day’s production into the system so we can track it and bill it.”

Holland’s fleet of mobile welding trucks can be deployed to repair railroad tracks that are well out of cell phone range, so data from handheld devices are currently done in a batch process at the end of the day as workers return to their hotel rooms or find a wifi hotspot. That will change soon, according to Tieri. “We are now testing various solutions to put satellite dishes on each truck so we can get closer to real time reporting.”

NEXT-GENERATION USABILITY

Holland will be one of the first companies in the world to implement a new user interface for IFS Applications designed to make enterprise software more intuitive and user-friendly. The new interface, which is based on Microsoft.NET technology, will offer both technological and ergonomic benefits that should both drive productivity, according to Tieri.

Tieri stresses that increased ease of use could be a real productivity boon for casual users of IFS Applications.

“Ease of use for the casual user is critical,” Tieri said “There are great things in there to promote productivity for the power users. But the people I am concerned with are the fringe users that don’t use the application every day, who still find it difficult to get in and find data. I look at this new user interface as a way for them to get into the application and get some data very simply without having to know how to go into customer orders, bring up a customer line or find a customer number.”

Particularly promising according to Tieri is Enterprise Application Search, a Google-like search engine integrated directly with IFS Applications. In comparison, ERP giants SAP and Oracle market search tools that are purchased separately from their enterprise software and require a separate implementation, configuration and implementation process, with all of the attendant expenses.

“The biggest thing I have seen so far is the search engine,” Tieri said. “As databases continue to grow, the ability to find specific bits of information is more of a challenge, particularly for the average user who does not know how to use the application. With this Google-like search, it is easy to find a customer, a part, or something that refers to a broken rod ... that’s huge.”

But Tieri is also enthusiastic about the fact that the new interface will streamline delivery of applications over the web by moving IFS Applications essentially onto a software-as-a-service model.

“Probably the biggest thing for the side of our business where we have numerous remote locations is the ability to deliver the application data through a web browser,” Tieri said. “It potentially takes the whole Citrix thing off of the table, eliminating one thing that makes remote locations problematic.”

BENEFITS

- Project-centric business compresses project timelines and increases productivity, paving way for revenue growth.
- Single application for both sides of a manufacturing/construction hybrid business.
- Easy integration of wireless devices with the enterprise.
- Next-generation usability and simplicity.



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