

Barton Precision Engineering

Time, Money and being back in Control.

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Tighter Control is the Key Benefit for BPE

Barton Precision Engineering (BPE) is a company specializing in subcontract CNC machining and manufacture to drawings and requirements supplied by their customers. They produce parts and assemblies using materials such as steel, aluminium and plastics. Based on a modern industrial park in Bulwell on the outskirts of Nottingham they have recently celebrated 40 years of trading.

BPE made a decision to replace their existing computer based system in January 2005 and quickly chose Central One's Enterprise One solution to be that replacement.

"You could see straight away that comparing Enterprise One to our existing software was like comparing a Rolls Royce to a Mini." said Steve Walker Managing Director of BPE. "And so it's turned out to be. It's one of the best decisions I've made."

Walker points out that whilst companies differ in certain respects, all manufacturing companies are fundamentally the same:

"We all get enquiries, build estimates from them, then produce a quote and hopefully get the order. We then generate a production job, buy the raw materials, build the product, test and inspect it, and then ship it and invoice it."

His Enterprise One implementation gives him control of the entire operation from enquiry management to shipping the finished product.

"The amount of time we save is amazing." Walker adds. "To quote a job we get the customer's drawing and prepare a BoM. We get the BoM on the system, work out the quote and send it to the customer. Once he's happy and ready to go forwards, the system converts the quote into an order and generates the order acknowledgment. The route card is produced automatically and printed complete with Bar Codes to record progress around the shop floor. The system then generates a picking list, books the customer drawing into the drawing register and sends the job onto the factory floor. From receiving an order it takes less than 10 minutes to start a job running in the factory complete with all the associated documentation. That's about the average for an order with about a dozen lines on it."

As he spoke there were around 600 jobs running in the factory each of which is expected to be on the floor for 4 to 6 weeks.

"It used to take us 3 to 4 minutes simply to produce the route card, never mind anything else. The route card is now simply printed automatically as a matter of course. Assuming therefore, that on average 150 new jobs hit the floor each week we save 600 minutes or 10 hours per week just there. Well that's a quarter of someone's time. That's a four or five thousand pounds saving and that's just the start."

It used to take 1 to 1 ½ hours per day or about 1 day a week to reconcile the Works Order Requirements for jobs about to enter the production floor, materials in stock and stock reservation against existing jobs in order to produce a materials demand requirement. There was a lot of manual interaction involved in this process and a lot of scope for error. Enterprise One automatically produces a consolidated Works Order Requirements report saving time, money and the potential for error.

“So there’s another quarter of someone’s time.” continued Walker. “We also now use bar coding to book people on and off jobs. We used to use timesheets. That could take up to 2 days a week to administer. And our dispatch notes. We used to have to hand write or type them. That was another 2 days a week. And it could hold up shipping with all the cash flow implications that has. Now you just press a button and the system prints them for you.”

“I reckon that’s a person’s time you could save. In fact from our paper-based days to now we’ve reduced our office staff by a half. That’s some saving: Probably £25K in salary cost alone.”

Customer service has also improved. Previously, when a customer rang to ask for a progress report Walker would have to go out on the shop floor, physically locate the job and ask how long it would take to complete:

“That would take half an hour or so and I used to have to ring him back. Now, using Enterprise One’s powerful filtering options I can tell exactly where a job is on the floor. For example, a buyer called this morning and I could instantly tell him that 75% of his job was complete and waiting to ship, of the remainder, approximately a third was waiting for final inspection, the rest was in the milling shop. From that I was able to tell him with certainty that the job would ship on Monday. I could tell he was impressed. It must improve our customer’s perception of us.”

There are improvements in accuracy and quality too. For instance: At final inspection products are booked into finished stock using a bar code system.

“Well, bar coding means no there’s no need for manual entry. Manual entry means typing away at a keyboard and, well, we’re engineers not typists. Forcing us to type opens up the possibility of errors. We’ve had situations where product was entered into finished stock under the wrong job number. On the back of that I’ve told a customer his job was about to ship when in reality it was only half way through its manufacturing process. That was embarrassing! Bar coding means that everything is now automatic. The codes are printed on the route card. No need to enter anything at the keyboard. And no typing means no errors.”

Scrap costs are also lower. Using the same bar-coding system, material is booked in correctly in the right place. This has reduced the number of jobs using the wrong materials.

BPE operate under BS5750/ISO9000, something that Walker is proud of:

“When people ask me about the British Standard system I tell them it pays us back as at least as much as it costs by offering procedures and controls which we use to run our business. Our Enterprise One implementation dovetails in with these procedures: For example the system will not allow us to enter an order without a Contract Review. It will also flag up problems where the price on the order does not correspond to the price on the quote and so on.”

This is enabled using Enterprise One’s unique hierarchy of roles and permissions where each user can be given a range of tasks he/she is allowed to perform. These can be turned on or off where required.

Enterprise One can also be used remotely using a Virtual Private Network or VPN. Walker again:

“It’s amazing: I sat at home yesterday waiting to attend a dentist appointment and got 16 quotes done in an hour. I’ve also got used to running the sales reports from home each evening to see exactly where we are against plan. In fact, in some ways I prefer to do this stuff at home. There’s no interruptions, no fires to put out. You know it would be no exaggeration to say that I could use this system from home and run this factory remotely.”

When companies come to consider whether to stay with their existing systems, paper or computer, implementation issues are always uppermost in their mind. And rightly so as Walker found out:

“It took a year or more to implement our previous system. It was a nightmare. The solution to every problem unveiled a new one. Sometimes we despaired. Central One’s implementation process was different though. It took weeks at the most. The whole thing went through extremely smoothly. It was tremendously satisfying. And as a result we have full confidence in any upgrades they send us. We know that they’ll work first time without issue.”

He continued:

“The impact of change in putting in the system has been negligible but the rewards for having done so have been immense.”

But Walker is adamant that the main improvement from his perspective is control:

“As a Managing Director that’s what I need: I need to feel in control and Enterprise One does that for me. I can see with a click of a mouse exactly where we are; what needs doing; what problems need to be fixed. Before we implemented Enterprise One I remember my Chairman’s wife asked me on one occasion what was wrong. I told her that I felt out of control; that I was not on top of the business. She asked me recently whether I was back in control and thanks to Central One and its Enterprise One software I could answer: ‘Yes thanks, I am.’”