

Accuride Successfully Executes Growth Strategy With Help from the Plex Manufacturing Cloud



About the Company:

Headquartered in Evansville, Indiana, Accuride Corporation is a leading supplier of wheels and wheel-end components to the North American and European commercial vehicle markets. The company serves all major segments of the commercial vehicle market including manufacturers of heavy-duty and medium-duty trucks, commercial trailers, light trucks, buses as well as specialty and military vehicles. Accuride products are manufactured in facilities throughout North America and Europe.

Business Challenges:

- Difficulty getting a comprehensive picture on how operations were performing with seven disparate systems.
- Spend a lot of time and resources gathering and questioning the data instead of using it to make decisions.
- A diversified product portfolio that needed streamlining with better operational support.
- Lack of enterprise-wide visibility, decision-making, and negotiating power.

Solution Benefits:

- Improved supply chain productivity time by 10%.
- Reduced hardware requisition time from days to 30 minutes.
- Ships within 3 hours for production lines that run 15 to 20 different part numbers per day.
- Won 2014 Manufacturing Excellence Award from the Association for Manufacturing Excellence (AME) for Henderson, Kentucky wheel plant.

Overcoming the challenge of integration through “Fix & Grow” strategy

In 2011, the Company embarked on its “Fix & Grow” strategy, investing more than \$150 million to successfully restore its core operations to reliable, profitable performance. Sale of non-core businesses helped fund the work. The changes included consolidating and upgrading its steel wheel capacity, expanding its aluminum wheel capacity, restoring its Gunite wheel-end business to profitability and implementing common LEAN Operating Systems.

With the heavy lifting of its “Fix” now complete and its plants delivering world-class levels of performance, Accuride has begun to turn its attention to growing its business beyond its North American markets.

One important element of “Fix & Grow” remains underway: the implementation of its new, companywide ERP system.

Paul Wright, IT Director at Accuride explains: “Because Accuride was built through acquisition, each of the different businesses brought together had its own way of doing things, and some of our brands were using older ERP systems that didn’t fit with our business vision. Data was disconnected from the reality of our plants, and we were spending more time gathering and interrogating data than we were making decisions with it.”

Wright and his team – supported by implementation teams at Accuride’s facilities – have systematically taken action on the systems and processes that were creating business disruption. Together, they are creating a common platform for managing operations in a streamlined and cohesive manner, and they are leveraging that platform to fulfill growth ambitions.

The business requirement was clear: Accuride needed a solution that could give them a single version of the truth, with data sets that were consistent across all operations. But not just that, the leadership team wanted to build a system that fit with their lean manufacturing ethos. They didn’t want to be producing high-quality product today while having people keying in the results of yesterday’s activity. Instead, they wanted to make decisions rapidly and more accurately using information that’s directly connected to the plant floor.

Putting Plex in the frame

“We brought in external consultants to help with the discovery process and present options for Accuride’s successful adoption of a new ERP solution. Together, we evaluated some of the more mature ERPs from organizations including Infor, SAP and Oracle.

However, anything that we wanted to do which is specific to our industry would have meant buying separate bolt-ons and having specialists come in to integrate them into the main ERP.

“We felt Plex was a much better fit for us because it is designed specifically for manufacturers.”

Rick Dauch, our President and CEO had previous experience with Plex which gave us significant peace of mind. In addition, after signing with Plex, we were invited into the Plex User Community and by connecting with other customers, it was immediately obvious how the Plex Manufacturing Cloud could deliver rapid business advantage.”

What’s right with Plex?

The Plex Manufacturing Cloud ticked many boxes for Accuride, providing all the processes the firm required from the shop floor to the top floor; everything from supply chain management to production scheduling, quality management to shipping and inventory management.

“With Plex all our activities and the data they produce are linked so that we can see in real time what is really happening in our business,” notes Wright. “For example, we can get data for all direct and indirect purchasing and link that to transactional activities on the floor whether that’s production or maintenance, and integrate that with quality information and shipping. This kind of flexibility means we can move away from more traditional logistics arrangements to using Kanbans inside the system, and that will help us to be more nimble and able to react rapidly to customer demands.”

With the “Grow” portion of its business strategy firmly in mind, Accuride found Plex’s unique approach to licensing very appealing, paying for the solution as a percentage of revenue rather than on a per-user basis. This was a crucial selection factor because making an ERP tool available for everyone was essential.

Wright again: “With Plex, we were able to step into multiple modules in one go. Because it’s so connected within one database it’s easy to make logical steps from MRO into maintenance and then quality into production and shipping, meaning the Plex Manufacturing Cloud can rapidly transform how we work.”



A broad and deep deployment

Today Accuride has deployed all the modules Plex offers with the exception of Tooling which will be rolled out across its foundries in the future. The solution is live at the manufacturer’s corporate office, its largest steel wheel and largest aluminum wheel plants with a secondary aluminum plant also operating Plex. Soon Accuride will deploy the Plex Manufacturing Cloud to its distribution channel, its Canadian operations and those in Rockford to support the firm’s growth strategy.

Achieving such a successful deployment meant Wright had to gain significant management buy-in. He assigned process mapping and improvement activities to business process owners to ensure that they achieved a best practice deployment, and that each functional team gained optimal outcomes.

“We went to Plex Boot Camp, something offered by Plex Educational Services, we became very active members of the Plex User Group and, since our go live, we have become members of the Plex Customer Advisory Board,” said Wright. “That’s what I really value about Plex; they put the resources in to help you make the most of your investment, and they actively pursue customer feedback, so that their technology is always evolving. We have also been a Limited Availability customer, for capabilities including the new Plex user interface and Enterprise Supply Chain, piloting the solutions with Plex.”

Real results for the real-time manufacturing era

“Our lean approach has allowed us to maintain capacity while simplifying our operations right across the value chain. What that means for customers is that they are assured a premium quality product, delivered consistently on time, at a reasonable cost,” explains Wright. “The Plex Manufacturing Cloud is playing a significant role in helping us achieve that. In fact the Association for Manufacturing Excellence (AME) recently presented our Henderson, Kentucky wheel plant with a 2014 Manufacturing Excellence Award, one of only four plants in North America to be so honored. That is an incredible feat, made more significant when you consider that we are the first commercial truck component manufacturer to win this award for being a LEAN organization!”

The foremost advantage of deploying the Plex Manufacturing Cloud has been the visibility it has allowed. Accuride prides itself on being a dependable supplier to its customers, and that starts with knowing exactly what is going on in the business at all times – then having the facility to make immediate decisions.

As Wright describes, this has been successfully achieved:

“From big decisions to small ones we now have the ability to take action faster.”

For example, hardware requisitions can now be effected in just half an hour rather than a number of days it previously took. That’s because all stakeholders – across the globe – can log into the system from any mobile device. Plex is secure, so we are happy and confident to share and access information in the cloud.”

Workflows are more fluid. Activities can be tracked and reassigned in moments because managers no longer need to be in the office or connected to a VPN to oversee employees.

Customer satisfaction is soaring. Accuride can instantly see if fulfillment can be achieved from a specific location. If it can’t they can see which site can execute the job and get a rapid response to customers.

Process automation is effortless too. As soon as a production machine clicks into operation all associated processes, such as inventory deduction, are automated. For example, some production lines run 15 to 20 different part numbers per day and with Plex, Accuride can ship inventory within 3 hours.

Wright believes that quality and traceability are far superior: “Should there be a problem with a part we can see where it went to, retrieve it, understand which components were used in its manufacture, and then predict where other quality issues may arise before they happen. That kind of visibility turns quality management into a profit center.”

Clearly all this could not be achieved if users rejected the system. “I told our leadership team that Plex would be as easy as using Amazon, and it is,” claims Wright. “We certainly had a few employees who didn’t want to use technology, but now that they can see how much easier it makes their lives and how much more efficient they are, everyone is fully on board. Our maintenance team, an extremely skilled team of professionals wouldn’t have been integrated with the system. Now iPads on the shop floor are a normal part of the process.”

Wright concludes: “Plex has played a huge role in helping us to consolidate and transform the performance of our business, making us a super-efficient manufacturer across our product range. Our customers are happy, we have secured our place in the market and our bottom line is healthy. Plex has played a strong role in setting us up for more business success in future.”

About Plex

Plex is the Manufacturing Cloud, delivering industry-leading ERP and manufacturing automation to more than 600 companies across process and discrete industries. Plex pioneered cloud solutions for the shop floor, connecting suppliers, machines, people, systems, and customers with capabilities that are easy to configure, deliver continuous innovation, and reduce IT costs. With insight that starts on the production line, Plex helps companies see and understand every aspect of their business ecosystems, enabling them to lead in ever-changing markets. Learn more at www.plex.com

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