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WILLIAMS & OAKEY'S LEAP OF FAITH MORE THAN REPAYS ITSELF

A number of engineering subcontractors still use DOS based production management software to manage shop floor manufacturing and assembly activities. As this platform is no longer supported, it has become increasingly difficult to rely upon its continued use. This was exactly the situation faced by Williams & Oakey, and now having made the successful transition to the Windows based PSL Datatrack production management and business administration software, the company has been delighted with the results.

"Moving away from the bespoke DOS operating platform was not a decision that was taken lightly," says Williams & Oakey's Materials & IT Manager Martin Presley. "We had become too comfortable with the old system and there were inherent risks in trying to continue, so in 2012 we started to look at alternatives. We spoke to a number of software companies but were attracted by an article we saw in the press about an engineering subcontractor in a similar situation to us. They had gone down the PSL



Datatrack route without any difficulty. We had a presentation from PSL Datatrack and also made a visit to an existing customer. That convinced us to go with PSL. Their software is flexible, modular and we felt it would be easily adaptable to our specific business model."

Based in Midsomer Norton, Somerset, Williams & Oakey has been in existence for nearly 60 years, with its core business supplying high quality machined parts and fabrications to a range of customers in many different industries. The emphasis has been on offering a one stop shop, engaged not only in precision CNC machining but also pre-treatment and finishing using the latest powder coating technology. Quality standards are essential and with its ISO9001 accreditation, the company provides its sub-contract

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Page 2

services to many companies where traceability is a prerequisite. This includes supplying a market leading actuator manufacturer with EP (explosion proof) and WT (water tight) castings. The company also has a full range of facilities including pressure testing, quality control, secure storage and the despatch of finished fabrications directly to its customers' own clients. Latterly, there has been expansion into other new business areas including hydro-dipping and alloy wheel refurbishment.



Controlling all the processes through the factory had always been undertaken using the bespoke DOS system, but this had put a lot of pressure on Martin who was responsible not only for writing and running all the software programs, but continuously adapting older technology to work alongside the modern alternatives enabling the company to maintain continuity of production.

Although the situation had become more and more untenable, the final decision to switch to PSL Datatrack was not without its concerns. "Having worked with DOS for many years, there were worries about the transition to the Windows based PSL Datatrack system. We were concerned about potential loss of manufacturing data – essential to our traceability – and also whether the theory of using PSL Datatrack might not be quite as easy in practice if the learning curve was steep for our staff who had been so accustomed to the DOS platform. Making the leap of faith has been the right decision."

"One of the pleasant surprises of switching to PSL Datatrack was the low financial investment that it entailed for us. There was no need to invest in new servers as PSL Datatrack could be run from the company's existing PCs." said Martin. Williams & Oakey was able to take advantage of the modularity of PSL Datatrack software and only invested initially in the core modules under a single user licence. These

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Page 3

included Quotations, Works Orders, Purchase Orders, Goods Received, Materials Stock, Component Stocks, Deliveries and Invoicing.

Working closely with PSL Datatrack, Martin used all his experience and took responsibility for learning about the operation of the software. He then successfully implemented the live system in stages. It now controls every aspect of the progress of every customer order, from quotation to invoice. It generates all the accompanying documentation right down to batch identification labels and deliveries, not just for direct customers but also on Williams & Oakey's customers' headed paper to be sent directly to their clients.

Supported by PSL Datatrack, Martin chose to train in-house all the company's shop floor and office based staff on how to use the software. Today, there are two Datatrack stations in the factory where operators clock in and out as well as logging all the required information about every order that passes through, essential for traceability. Management reports can be produced as required to check any aspect of the production process and on the shop floor, documentation such as inspection sheets can be generated.



Following the success of the initial implementation, Williams & Oakey took advantage of the Time & Attendance, Shop Floor Data Collection, Scheduler and Non-Conformance modules. In addition they

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Page 4

added extra user licences to give access to more staff and even closer control of the engineering process. This has provided more in-depth reporting that allows the company to intervene as necessary and change manufacturing procedures in order to improve efficiency. "PSL Datatrack is very flexible and we have received excellent support when we have wanted to customise the software to suit our particular reporting requirements." says Martin.

There are plans to continue to expand on what PSL Datatrack can offer, such as setting up a complete database of customer engineering drawings under document management and also the possibility of extending the use of the software to manage the successful hydro-dipping and alloy wheel refurbishment side of the business.

PSL Datatrack is helping Williams & Oakey to maintain its position as a highly reliable supplier of high quality precision engineering services at a time when the industry is becoming increasingly competitive and in a period of change. "We have put our faith in the professionalism of PSL Datatrack and it is really paying off. I don't have to run or write the software anymore and can focus my time on the important management of our processes. Now we have the PSL Datatrack system, the benefits are immeasurable." concludes Martin.

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