American Printing House for the Blind

APH is recognized for the contributions it makes to better the lives of the blind and visually impaired all across the United States. With SYSPRO, APH can trust the business is running efficiently and continue to focus its efforts on providing life-enhancing tools to its community.

■ The Company

American Printing House for the Blind (APH) is the world's largest company devoted solely to creating products and services for people who are visually-impaired. Founded in 1858, the Louisville, Kent. based company is the oldest institution of its kind in the United States. The not-for-profit company operates on government grants and donations from corporations, foundations and individuals.

APH manufactures more than 800 products that promote independence for the blind and visually-impaired. These products give blind students more of an equal opportunity in the classroom, and blind adults more of an equal opportunity in the workplace. APH products include education and daily living products, including Braille and large type textbooks, Braille teaching and educational products, accessible computer products, talking books and audio equipment. The company also offers such unique tools as Braille slates, tactile rulers, abacuses and special reading lamps. Additionally APH offers, on a no-charge basis, three magazines (Readers Digest, Newsweek and Weekly Reader) on cassette and in Braille to eligible blind readers who are U.S. citizens.

"The software enables periodic adjustments for scrap and damaged parts so that physical inventory and the general ledger are always in balance."

- Bill Beavin
CFO, APH

Though APH is a not-for-profit organization, it endeavors to maximize available resources through the application of technology. The company promotes the use of computers, for example, through specialized training tools: CD-ROM tutorials offer users the opportunity to learn about the icons, keyboard controls and screens of the Microsoft Windows operating system.

Under the 1979 Federal Act to Promote the Education of the Blind, APH is the official supplier of educational materials for visually-impaired students below the college level in the United States and its territories. The funds appropriated under the ACT are used by each state to purchase educational materials from APH for their blind students at lower than college level.

The company mainly derives its income from products sales and outside contributions, and has managed to maintain a relatively constant annual revenue flow over the past several years of approximately $25 million. But perhaps a better measure of the company's growth is the number of new products introduced for the blind and visually-impaired each calendar year. During the past half dozen or so years, APH has introduced an average of 45 to 50 educational, workplace and lifestyle products annually.

■ AT A GLANCE ■

COMPANY
American Printing House for the Blind

INDUSTRY
Educational Materials Manufacturing

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES
250

THE CHALLENGE
- Inefficient records maintenance
- Expanding inventory list
- Heavy training
- Time consuming
- Error-prone, costly system
- Inaccurate scheduling

SOLUTION & SERVICES
- Fully integrated
- Strong core financial functionality
- User-friendly system
- Cost-effective solution
- Seamless migration
- Supports multi-mode manufacturing

THE BENEFITS
- Efficient scheduling
- Increased visibility
- Balanced ledger
- Decreased standing inventory
- Reduced costs and error
- Improved customer service

The Challenge

When Bill Beavin, CFO, joined the company in the early 1990s, APH was using mainframe-oriented computer software to run its operations. The system was cumbersome, expensive to operate and maintain and required extensive data entry and heavy worker training. Beavin saw the need for a cost-effective Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system that was fully-integrated, easy-to-use and which could provide numerous reports to help management to improve overall efficiency.

The Solution

After looking at numerous software packages, APH selected SYSPRO ERP from Costa Mesa, Calif.-based SYSPRO. The selection was based on the product's ability to handle a variety of functions, including accounting, order entry, MRP II (Materials Resource Planning) and inventory control.

Originally loaded onto Novell NetWare, APH worked with SYSPRO Value Added Reseller Matchware Consulting to migrate the 32-user system to Microsoft Windows NT. Beavin felt the migration would enable the company to add additional Microsoft-compatible functionality.

Today, APH uses SYSPRO for all day-to-day business functions, such as financial, inventory control, purchasing, order processing, engineering change control and returned merchandise authorization.

The Result

According to Beavin, SYSPRO plays a key role in inventory control. The software enables periodic adjustments for scrap and damaged parts so that physical inventory and the general ledger are always in balance.

The SYSPRO software also plays a major role in production scheduling. APH's manufacturing processes fall into three categories: contract work, make-on-demand and make-to-stock. APH is able to keep its factory running at full capacity, satisfy customer delivery requirements and reduce costs through strategic forecasting and scheduling. This has enabled the company to reduce finished goods inventories while orders have remained constant.

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