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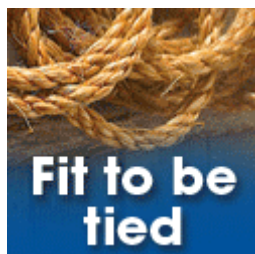
Thriving in one-of-a-kind manufacturing through .NET Solutions

By Thomas R. Cutler

Nexgen Technologies is an emerging leader in the manufacture of unique capital equipment designed for the semiconductor industry. Based in Santa Clara, CA Nexgen, leverages outsourcing of major components allowing their organization to focus on engineering, product development and testing. As a highly engineering focused manufacturer their business model is simple: be the best at delivering one-of-a-kind capital equipment. Designing and building to customer specification is a major differentiator and the word has spread quickly much to the satisfaction of the entrepreneurial Nexgen organization. The company heavily leverages outsourcing of major components which allow them to focus their time on engineering, product development and testing.

The next step in continuing the success is optimizing the challenging parts of the business. Operating at peak efficiency was critical for continued growth and profitability at the levels called for in the business plan. According to Steve Naylor, Director of IT at Nexgen, "The challenges to growth meant we needed an integrated business system in place that add controls and facilitate the numerous challenges presented in an Engineer-to-Order business like ours. Critical areas we needed to improve upon included speed and accuracy of quoting, managing actual costs, reducing cycle times between design and manufacturing, managing BOM revisions and project costs, billing for projects based on progress, streamline business procedures, and eliminate wasted approval and notification bottlenecks."

Nexgen Technologies current ERP system, a product first released in 1991, lacked several



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key areas that have now become critical to the business. There were many shortcomings of the old system that were limiting this complex Engineer to Order (ETO) manufacturer. Nexgen was encumbered with a system full of obstacles that slowed responsiveness, hindered visibility to project costs, and consumed unnecessary cycles due to lack of workflow (creating ineffective sneaker net communications.)

Nexgen required a solution that would give them the controls and effective technology in combination with comprehensive functionality for their complex manufacturing requirements. After many months of evaluation of ERP systems Nexgen selected VISIBILITY.net ERP. According to Naylor, "This ERP solution is exactly what we were looking for and is oriented on our type of one-of-a-kind manufacturing business. They understand our business demands and have 20 plus years of experience implementing their solution effectively. What we liked most was the comprehensiveness of the software and how it will enable us to optimize all areas of our business. From quotes, to costing, financial compliance, projects, business process improvements through workflow and will accommodate our growth with multi-entity and multi-lingual. Additionally, it was designed from the onset using Microsoft's .net which gives us a contemporary business platform to grow our business on. "

A new enterprise solution to manage a complex ETO and Make-to-Order manufacturing organization is one of the most important long-term business decisions a company will make. The investment is large, especially for a small to medium manufacturing company; most manufacturing companies do not have the internal expertise or knowledge to dig under the mounds of vendor marketing literature and hype to truly understand the vendor's offering. The demo process provided some insight into the software's capabilities; however there may be costly nuances to the technology requirements to support the functionality that may not be evident. It is very important to identify a software vendor who understands and has deep experience in the ETO type of business.


With the recent advent of .NET technology, the problems encountered by Nexgen's previous system limitations were erased with the ERP solution chosen. 100% written in .NET-managed code, the new ERP system was developed to support multi-site ETO/MTO manufacturers.

The benefits of a true multi-site ETO/MTO solution:

1. The .NET architecture eliminates the need for Citrix or other remote access applications. Instead, users can access the .net solution from anywhere in the world as long as they have a browser, like Internet Explorer, and an Internet connection. This also eliminates the need for multiple costly Unix or Citrix servers, lowering the total cost of ownership and IT maintenance requirements.


2. A true multi-site ERP system eliminates the need to maintain multiple databases. Each site can be set-up as a separate manufacturing entity within a single database. This allows a single listing of part numbers to be shared across all entities. Moreover, the part costs, pricing, and MRP planning parameters can be unique by entity. Custom solutions are not





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necessary to handle inventory transfers between sites.

3. Powerful security features allow each and every field within the application to be controlled. Field level control, by user, may be set to Active, Inactive, or Read Only. This feature allows full control over which users have access to costing data yielding substantial compliance benefits.

According to Stephen Carson, executive vice-president of Visibility, "Our .NET ERP solution reduces hardware and maintenance costs for one-of-a-kind (ETO/MTO) manufacturers. With only a single database to manage, the inherent complexities of maintaining separate databases are eliminated, thereby increasing the accuracy of tracking costs. "

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