

Ulbrich Stainless Steel & Specialty Metals, Inc.

AXIS™ ERP

Ulbrich Integrates Worldwide Operations and Gains Process Efficiencies



Outdated ERP Software not up to Task

As a leading specialty metals processor with 13 major facilities worldwide, Ulbrich Stainless Steels & Specialty Metals, Inc. (Ulbrich) serves the needs of suppliers in the automotive, aerospace, nuclear, solar energy, medical equipment and many other industries. The company produces a wide range of sophisticated and highly-reliable products made from stainless steel, nickel alloy, titanium, titanium alloy, cobalt alloys and other materials. Ulbrich's operations are complex, its customers are demanding, and its business has to adapt to constant change.

It's the kind of business that demands a high-performance enterprise software system designed specifically for the metals industry. But that's not what Ulbrich had in place. Instead, Ulbrich had multiple monolithic legacy systems, some based on 1970's-era designs. According to James Fulton, corporate director of management information systems for Ulbrich, the disparate, outmoded software infrastructure was, in large part, the result of the company's growth through acquisition to more than \$250 million in annual revenue and more than 600 employees.

"The systems were inefficient, expensive to operate and support, and lacked the integration we needed to succeed long-term," he explains. "Not only had our business requirements become more complex as we grew, the pace of change had accelerated."

As an example, he cites one new customer requirement to enter orders with three decimal place pounds instead of a whole pound. It took three employees six months to make this change to the mainframe system Ulbrich had in place.



ROI at a Glance:

Implementing AXIOM ERP enabled Ulbrich Stainless Steels & Specialty Metals, Inc. (Ulbrich), to replace its outmoded information technology systems with a single solution. The AXIOM ERP system has produced tangible business value to help Ulbrich:

- Reduce IT costs.
- Respond faster to changing customer demands.
- Improve materials management.
- Improve operations planning.
- Better manage its complex, multi-site production process.
- Strategically manage institutional knowledge.

“With the AXIOM ERP solution, the measurement of our factory output has improved dramatically.”

— James Fulton, Corporate Director of MIS, Ulbrich Stainless Steels & Specialty Metals, Inc

Modern, Metals-Specific Software Needed

“We had a critical need to simplify and consolidate our systems,” Fulton says. With this realization, the company developed a strategy to identify a single enterprise software system with metals industry functionality that it could implement worldwide. The process began with an internal analysis to identify precisely what challenges the new system would need to address.

“We came up with a long list of very specific capabilities the new system would need to deliver,” Fulton says, noting that a few capabilities stood out. “The ‘Rosetta Stone’ for our company is the knowledge and expertise in our Layout Group.” This team is comprised of metallurgists and other experts with responsibility to understand individual customer requirements and develop a plan that matches the right raw materials with the right processes to meet their requirements. “Most of this knowledge was in the heads of a few key people or written down in notebooks scattered throughout the company,” Fulton says. “It was a real risk to our business and we needed a new solution that would help us preserve and systematize this institutional knowledge.”

Because the company uses many different raw materials at 13 facilities worldwide, materials management was another key consideration. “For us, the ability to understand what facility has what inventory was critical,” Fulton explains. “Instead of each location managing its own inventory, our strategy was to manage inventory on the corporate level.”

Ulbrich was also looking for a dramatic improvement in the flexibility of its software system. “We needed a system that could change as quickly as our business needs change and also be scalable enough to support facilities with as little as 20 employees or as many as 200,” he says. “We also were seeking specialized capabilities that could support our complex production process that, at times, necessitates that we use multiple facilities to produce a single product. This makes it critical that we have the ability to control customer orders, production processes, and materials centrally.”

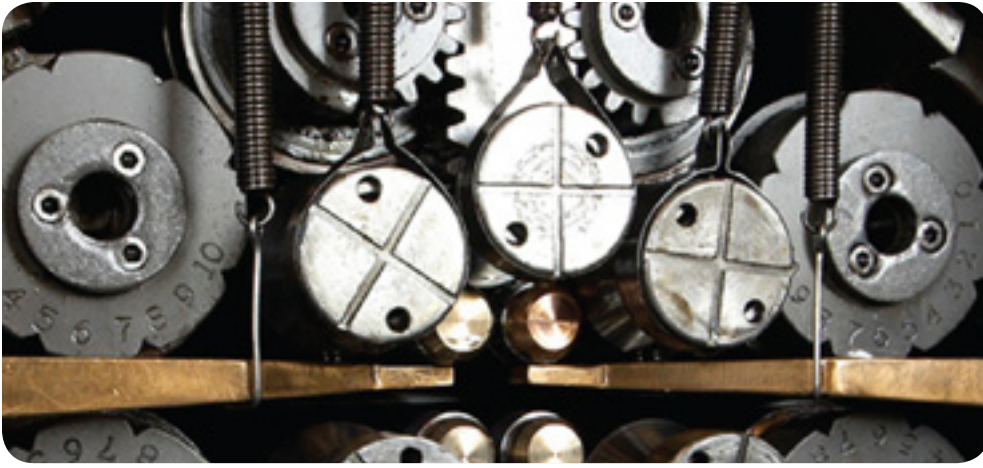
Usability was another major concern. “My boss notes that people in an organization can operate two levels above their job description if they have easy and effective access to the right information,” said Fulton. “We wanted the new system to be easy to use so our employees could access the information necessary to maximize their contribution.”

With these criteria established, Fulton and his team cast a wide net looking for possible new solutions. “We initially looked at 27 systems and then began a process of eliminating certain solutions that lacked what we needed,” he says. The first sort eliminated all systems that lacked customers in the metals industry. Next the company ruled out all systems that hadn’t been proven in a manufacturing environment.

“We have both service centers where we change the length and width of materials and mills where we also change the thickness of the raw materials,” explained Fulton. “By changing the thickness, you impart different physical characteristics, including tensile, yield, elongation and hardness. We found that it was difficult to get service center software to scale up and support the more challenging manufacturing processes we have at our mills.”

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Corporate Director of MIS
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Metals Expertise Impresses

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After selecting the AXIOM ERP solution, the Ulbrich and AXIS teams collaborated for six months to transfer knowledge between the two companies. "We learned how their software works and they learned how our business operates," Fulton recalled. "Where we identified gaps in functionality, the AXIS team was very responsive in expanding the capabilities of the core product to meet our unique needs."

Because of the size, complexity, and regional scope of Ulbrich's operations, the company adopted a methodical implementation strategy that includes updating internal business processes as it brings the new AXIOM ERP software online. "We began implementing the financial management capabilities and some manufacturing functionality in 2009, and expect to complete implementation of all capabilities at all 13 facilities in 2012," he says.

Even before completing the full system implementation, Ulbrich saw numerous tangible business benefits. "In the past, we struggled to accurately measure the detailed shop floor production," Fulton explains. "With the AXIOM ERP solution, the accuracy of our shop floor reporting has improved dramatically."

Enhanced Business Practices

Fulton credits AXIOM ERP with making Ulbrich a more disciplined business organization: "Because the system is integrated it forces us to implement and adhere to more disciplined business processes. We used to be good at doing end arounds in our old system. By precluding this practice, the AXIOM ERP system is helping us become a more efficient business."

The company is also finding that new layout employees become more productive sooner. "Because the system enforces business and process rules, reduces manual calculations and encourages consistency, the time it takes to get new layout employees competent and productive has shrunk from years to months," says Fulton. "There is a lot of business value in accelerating that process."

Fulton is confident that AXIOM ERP was the right choice for Ulbrich. "I never want our software system to hold back our ability to implement the new processes we need to improve our operations and adapt to change," he says. "Our experience with the AXIOM ERP solution and the AXIS team has been good, and I expect that to continue."

About Consona ERP

Consona Corporation is a worldwide leader in providing customer relationship management (CRM) and enterprise resource planning (ERP) software and services for companies of all sizes. Consona serves more than 4,500 customers worldwide and across a variety of industries.

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