

Steel firm customizes to hammer out ERP upgrade

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by Jeff Jedras

When it went looking for an enterprise resource planning solution, Hamilton-based steel supplier [Parkdale International Ltd.](#) said it had needs that went beyond the typical off the shelf software package.

Parkdale buys steel in Canada and sells it in the United States, which means making purchases in Canadian funds but selling its product in U.S. dollars. Material enters its system in imperial weights but is sold in metric.

The company had been using a customized, book-based system that had been adopted into a software package, but Parkdale sales manager Stephen Margles said as Parkdale continued to expand; the system became more and more limiting and inflexible in terms of what staff could do with it.

"The person who programmed it wasn't available anymore, so we were at risk of the system going down and no one being able to help us," said Margles.

Dealing in devalued steel, purchased from a major manufacturer with some minor defect it then resells, the company needed something that would avoid the set fields that made it impossible to sort through those defects.

Parkdale selected the Steel Enterprise Management System (SEMS) from Toronto-based [Steelman Software Solutions Inc.](#) Margles said the company felt SEMS offered the flexibility and customization to the steel industry it was looking for while providing for future growth.

"We're not always sure where the next opportunity will come from but we have to be able to react quickly," said Margles. "When we do something new or different the system is flexible enough to incorporate that change with relative ease."

Margles said SEMS has allowed Parkdale to keep better tabs on its inventory. Warehouse staff have been equipped with Intermec barcode scanners tied into SEMS and are doing data entry as new material comes into the warehouse, allowing it to get into the sales pipeline more quickly.

"It allows our sales people to make decisions faster, and it allows management to analyze the sales and inventory," said Margles. "The whole purpose is to make better decisions and to make them faster."

In particular, Margles said the barcode system is leading to quicker production. If someone is filling an order on the weekend and they need more material, they can just scan the barcode to see if that coil is available rather than waiting to check with the office staff on Monday. "It gives people the ability to do their jobs and not have to wait for someone to do it for them," said Margles.

"We've done a fair amount of training and there's been some wrinkles but I think people are really happy with the system."

For Steelman, managing director Daniel Brody said Parkdale is the first installation of its latest SEMS product, which has been in development for three years.

"It really is the software tool for the metal services marketplace," said Brody. "It encompasses everything from order-entry all the way through to shipping, product configuration, planning,



production, scheduling, production recording, inventory control, shipping, claims management, and quality assurance."

The web-based tools package is built on top of the Oracle Database 9i Release Two core technology. Brody said Steelman customized the solution for Parkdale to account for its secondary steel business, allowing the system to record all the defects within a coil or a sheet so they could easily track it and sell it before it can be processed.

While the SEMS installation with Parkdale took five months to complete because of the degree of customization and because it was the first install of the solution, Brody said three months will be a more normal time frame going forward for a company of that size.

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