

# Automation software helps steelmaker make the cut

BY SHERRI TELENKO

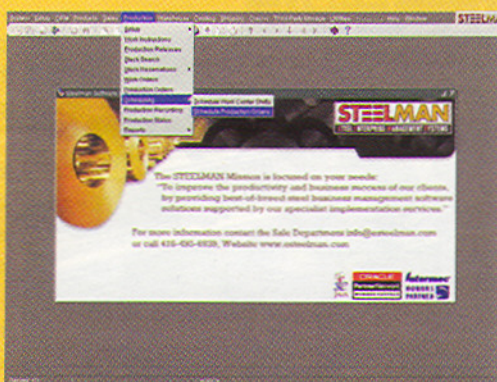
Parkdale International Limited is part of a volatile industry. Recently, the Hamilton, Ont.-based company went from a system that saw shop-floor employees using pen and paper to a fully automated data-and-inventory management software package integrated throughout the entire operation. The upgrading team worked with Toronto-based STEELMAN Software Solutions Inc.

Parkdale's business is steel, an industry experiencing unprecedented global fluctuations. The company specializes in buying and selling devalued carbon steel products, primarily flat rolled. Extensive evaluation of every shipment is necessary, and often the product is slit or sliced into sheets. But this process isn't simple.

"We may get a coil that's 10,000 pounds and a customer wants sheets out of it," says Stephen Margles, sales manager, Parkdale. "As we are running it out, part way through, we get some bad steel. Our machines are set up to separate the good from the bad and we sell the piles to different customers." Previously, this change was noted on a piece of paper and forwarded to accounting. The company needed a reliable system that would note the input item and divide the cost appropriately between each bundle.

"We put a lot of responsibility on our operations side to do their job properly," Margles says. "With this software, we've given them the tools to do not just the physical labour, but the computer data entry which makes everyone's job easier."

Imbedded with the Oracle 9i infrastructure software, STEELMAN's suite of products includes warehouse management, manufacturing control and quality assurance, and it is



designed for suppliers and processors of steel and other metal products. According to Daniel Brody, managing director, STEELMAN, "At an integrated mill that does everything, the system will take production from the liquid pot with its chemistry and apply it to the appropriate orders, then move it through the facility based on those orders."

Other companies sell similar software, but Parkdale says it selected STEELMAN because of the service they provide and flexibility of the product, Margles says. "Other companies weren't as receptive to modifying their systems," he says.

As with any new automation, the first few months weren't perfect. The development team needed to alter the reports that the system was producing, and servers needed to be coordinated. Margles offers this advice to anyone thinking of implementing a similar process: Don't start by using parallel systems. "That was a disaster," he says.

A mid-size company, Parkdale started almost 50 years ago as an extension of a family-run scrap metal business. Today, it is a lean automated operation. In one year, Parkdale went from Flintstones to Jetsons, according to Margles. "We hadn't been keeping up with technology. Now we have more than we need, but we want to be able to adapt quickly to change."

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