

Integrated vision

A powerful software solution creates an integrated management system at Birkby's Plastics

Birkby's Plastics specialises in the design, manufacture and assembly of plastic components for automotive and specialist industries worldwide using state-of-the-art technology.

The decision to use software to help automate their Quality Management System (QMS) came through Birkby's being faced with a number of different quality issues. Poor visibility had led to quality objectives and targets not being met, and a lack of understanding about the current business practice meant that existing Quality procedures had inconsistent content, and were therefore no longer valid. Their manual Non-conformance process meant that a large number of Corrective Actions were outstanding, and their internal audits lacked credibility. Poor scheduling of Audits, a lack of process maps and poor communication between the different Business Units only served to complicate the issues further.

"The quality issues we faced affected all elements of the business," says Steve Harrison, "from the customer enquiry process through to despatch, as well as the supporting services and systems. The effects were noticed by Birkby's in terms of quality, delivery and, significantly, cost."

Birkby's therefore began looking at software solutions that would help them overcome these quality issues, and drive the organisation forward. With the QS9000 requirement including Advanced Product Quality Planning (APQP), they therefore looked at solutions that would help them not just with document control and quality management, but also to help create and control the processes and documents required for APQP.

The ability to index documents, and then bring these documents back in customised binders, coupled

with the document routing and approval functionality were features of the Powerway Document Control solution that stood out to Birkby's. With QS9000 being a customer requirement from the Premier Automotive Group, the ability to hold multiple documents within one project file, and thereby avoiding hav-

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ing many Production Part Approval Process (PPAP) documents being saved in multiple directories of a variety of users within Birkby's was another, highly attractive feature:

"We chose Powerway mainly due to the Quality Planner functionality. Nothing came close in terms of the APQP and PPAP functionality provided by the Quality Planner module."

Implementation

Birkby's first purchased their Powerway Suite 2000 solution at the end of 2001. Since then, a pro-

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gramme of implementation has been running involving an extensive project team. Whilst some companies take the decision to implement a portion of what is available in Powerway Suite 2000, Birkby's took the approach of implementing as much as possible to gain maximum benefit.

With input from Powerway's Customer Program Management

(CPM) team, Birkby's were able to plan and prepare the implementation to ensure that the capabilities of the Powerway solution were fully understood in a training environment, prior to rolling out to the live system. With a nominated champion from the senior management team taking charge of the project and managing

the implementation from start to finish, Birkby's were able to build on the initial implementation plan provided by Powerway. In-house training facilities were created to ensure that large numbers of personnel could be trained effectively in a classroom style, and a unique training program was developed using extensive and tailored training materials to suite the needs of Birkby's and their employees.

With Powerway in place at Birkby's, the quality issues that Harrison initially faced are now carefully controlled. Simplifying docu-

ment distribution and control, Powerway offers regular documentation reviews, simplified document retrieval with easier access, history revision at the push of a button, and a significantly reduced document approval timescale. Powerway has also increased the visibility of audits and the resulting corrective and preventative actions, and eased the access of documentation during the

internal and external audit process. With manual processes internal audits would take Birkby's around 1.5 man days, but Harrison believes that this will be drastically reduced when common checklists are formulated over the next few months.

On the APQP side, Powerway has also helped Birkby's employees with the creation and control of documentation for PPAP submission.

Harrison also considers the implementation of Powerway Quality Planner to have helped Birkby's in terms of Part Submission Warrant (PSW) liability, and the time taken to generate APQP documentation:

"The use of Quality Planner reduces the PSW liability considerably. It allows engineers to concentrate on the document content as opposed to its format. Additionally, it reduces the time taken to generate a PPAP document set considerably, particularly if one uses a previous project file on which to base the new project. I would guess the time taken is reduced to up to 80%."


The APQP process at Birkby's is under constant review due to the wide customer base. All engineers involved in the process are utilising Powerway to implement the process, with best practices and lessons learned being communicated throughout the supply chain. Birkby's have also generated a number of generic, 'base' documents which are copied and individually tailored to suit the product. In this way, the documents reflect 'real life', enabling the real issues to be focused upon.

Future development

Currently, Birkby's have the full Environmental Management System, and 90% of the QMS documentation on Powerway. They are now starting to put their People Management System and Health and Safety Management System on Powerway as well, with the intent being to com-

bine all of these into a fully integrated Business Management System. They are also looking to use Powerway's 'binders' to manage other areas of their business. One example of this is to use the binders as part of the induction process where a new starter selects their job role and is presented with the full set of procedures, instructions and documents required for their job role.

Powerway is now helping Birkby's Plastics perform a complete system rewrite to improve their business, and through the increased visibility this provides. Birkby's are aiming for ISO/TS 16949 certification by the end of 2005, and improve their customer relationships through the ability to hit the quality, cost and delivery performance that is expected of them.

"The fresh approach, with the system rewrite," says Harrison, "has enabled BPL to create a suite of QMS documentation which reflects our business and industry, with a level of traceability and visibility above our initial expectations". 

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