

Inside **the** system

Establishing a streamlined workflow means reining in every detail while keeping information accessible



Nivert Metal Supply Inc. uses 4GL Solutions SM3 software to keep current on structural tubing, angle, channel and beam inventories.

BY GRETCHEN SALOIS

Customers expect traceability from the moment they are quoted an order, place the order, and finally, take delivery. Knowing where and when it will arrive is considered a given these days so companies have to ensure they have the capability to keep up with expectations.

“Previously we had to track heat numbers and other tasks outside the software system we were using,” recalls Aaron

Nivert, CFO at Nivert Metal Supply Inc., Throop, Pennsylvania. “We needed a system that would allow us to keep everything in one space and free up our guys from manually inputting and calculating information, which slowed down production.”

Nivert was in the final stages of securing a new software system when an unseemly situation occurred. “The original company we were considering flat out lied to us about a capability—it turns out they couldn’t do what they promised,” Nivert says. “I was flustered but received a

“OUR GUYS CAN CHECK [TO] SEE EXACTLY WHAT WE HAVE, HOW MUCH, AND WHERE IT’S LOCATED.”

**AARON NIVERT,
NIVERT METAL SUPPLY INC.**



“Some of our guys were scared to go from manual input to a computer entry system but they’re figuring it out,” says Aaron Nivert of converting to SM3 software.

call from 4GL and realized we could get what we needed with them.”

Straight to the point

Steel Manager III (SM3) from 4GL allows users to automate time-consuming manual tasks such as material test reports (MTR) retrieval, proof of delivery indexing and invoicing, among other features. SM3 functionality is a completely integrated and comprehensive ERP solution for needs including inventory management, purchasing, quoting, sales, linear nesting, plate nesting integration, inside processing, outside processing, production scheduling, picking, shipping manifest, complete accounting, reporting and bar coding.

“The flexibility of SM3 makes it an ideal solution for all metal centers, whether you are a general line distributor, or focus on pipe and tube, valves and fittings, OCTG products, tool steel, bar, plate, flat-rolled products, perforated and expanded metal, mesh, wire rope, specialty and structural steels, architectural

Log Number	Type	Heat Number	Size	Bin Location	Alt Invent City	Alt Pos	Country Of Origin	Onhand	Type	Pl
L00104	NA	12	12		42	44	USA	1,784	F	96
L00120	NA	1887	12	A2	44	8	SWEDEN	144	Q	1
L00200	NA	9173	12	41	96	6	CANADA	90	Q	6
L00240	NA	715871	12	1,510	92	8	CANADA	1,015	F	30
B00105	NA	66-78"		67	8	8	AUSTRALIA	67	F	1
L00201	NA	1902	12	10	10	10	AUSTRALIA	190	F	10
L00250	NA	431274	12	709	25	25	AUSTRALIA	709	F	25
L00106	NA	12		615	45	45	AUSTRALIA	615	F	45
B00101	NA	111-94"		3	1	1		3	F	1
O00201	NA	10627	8 11-10"	10	1	1		10	F	1
O00104	NA	7		11	1	1		11	F	1
A00104	NA	8		9	9	9		25	F	6
L00204	NA	71251	12	108	6	6		108	F	6
L00226	NA	1284	12	108	6	6		108	F	6
L00226	NA	891294	12	108	6	6		108	F	6

SM3 software allows users at Nivert Steel to track inventory in real-time instead of updates written by hand and viewed much later.

metals—along with any other type of metal,” says Paul Parsons, vice president, sales and marketing at 4GL Solutions, Stouffville, Ontario.

4GL had Nivert visit Penn Stainless in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, to observe how the stainless distributor was using the software. “We realized that 4GL’s software could adapt to our needs,” Nivert says. Nivert Metals processes a lot of material using multiple burn tables, shears, and band and plate saws. “We really sell a little bit of everything—mostly carbon hot- and cold-rolled sheet and plate, as well as alu-

minum, stainless and some other products.”

Practical application

“One area in particular where SM3 software helped us is how we handle remnant pieces left over from jobs,” Nivert says. “We were struggling to manage those, especially sheet and plate. Now we can calculate that material into potential customer orders. A customer might come to us with a last minute need for a 3-foot by 2-foot piece and we can tell them we have a 3-foot by 4-foot piece available right

now—and they take it.”

The user-friendly software uses Windows screens, allowing users to navigate by clicking a mouse or keeping hands on the keyboard using the function keys. Any questions users might have can be answered by 4GL implementation specialists who have backgrounds in the metals industry, including management positions at service centers, says Parsons.

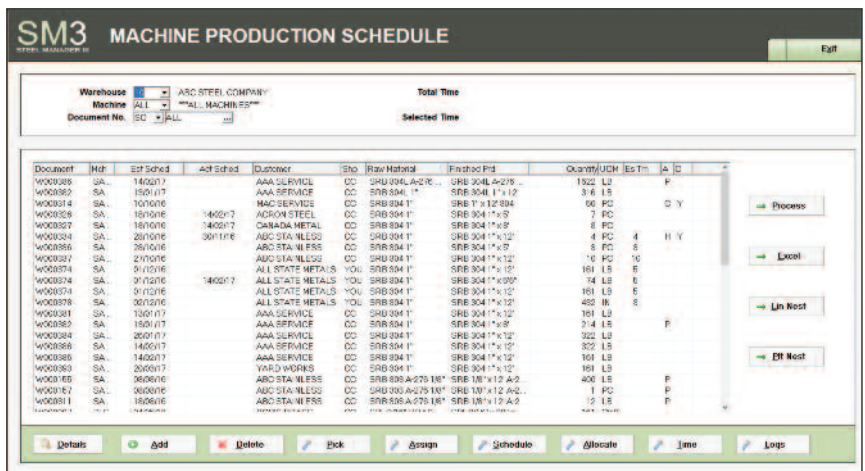
Over the last year, Nivert says his shop continues to adjust to the new system. “We were already using bar code scanners in most areas, but the burn table was still being recorded manually,” he explains. “Some of our guys were scared to go from manual input to a computer entry system but they’re figuring it out.”

The system has helped the shop floor organize its processes as well as reinforce its customer service. “We maintain strong relationships with clients so the software made the connection between customers and the shop floor easier to navigate,” Nivert says.

As employees adjust, using handwritten work orders are becoming less necessary. “Our shop guys are becoming more familiar with the computer terminals and accessing inventory,” Nivert says. “Whereas before we might get an order and not have enough time to manually sort through inventory to see if we had an odd piece on hand. So we’d backorder it to make sure we had it in time—now our guys can check in the software and see exactly what we have, how much, and where it’s located.

“We’re in the process of installing a new racking system and can now use location systems in SM3, which we couldn’t do before,” he continues. “We’re three-fourths of the way through the process and once we have the bar stickers on each shelf, we’ll be that much more comfortable finding whatever last-minute bundles a customer might need.”

Increased inventory accuracy and quick access points for sales and shop floor alike have made the daily workings of the business easier, Nivert says. “From the beginning 4GL has been with us to integrate the software into our day-to-day,” he says. “We know we can reach someone when we need help and it allows us to continue servicing our customers with the



Employees can prioritize tasks after reviewing the current production in SM3, making it easier to provide fast quotes to customers.

reliability they expect from us.”

On the horizon

For the past two years, 4GL has been working on its latest version of SM3, which has updated Windows screens backed by an Oracle database. “Not only does it harness the power of Oracle, but it contains numerous new features that our customers will really enjoy,” Parsons says. Features include an updated customer portal, non-conformance report (NCR) tracking, electronic data interchange (EDI) functionality enhancements, manifest and load planning enhancements (for the most efficient way to load trucks), and request for quotation (RFQ) enhancements.

In particular, 4GL’s Task Manager feature frees sales managers from manually filling out paper forms to move around the production floor and office. Both management and staff receive tasks in a standardized format that can be filtered by user, date, type of job entry, and status of a task.

“Tasks can be assigned to individuals or groups, i.e. the credit department and sales

management [with the task assigned] to users within that group,” Parsons explains. “Staff can prioritize and handle the most critical tasks quickly. Individuals will view their task manager screens and management can also view individuals’ task manager screens, which will allow management and staff to quickly view and act on various tasks including material buyout approval, credit/debit memo approvals, purchase order approval, etc.”

Nivert says that “using the 4GL software has made our back end of the job easier. Instead of checking material manually—leaving the possibility that you figure out a mistake when it’s too late—we can track each step and catch anything before material is out the door. We’ve increased inventory accuracy and are more efficient because of it,” he adds. ■

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