



4GL Solutions linked and automated ASA Alloy's processes, eliminated bottlenecks and provided a comprehensive range of functionalities.

CONNECTIVITY

ERP software tailored to the metals industry links and automates company's processes while eliminating roadblocks

BY LYNN STANLEY

Albert Einstein had three rules when it came to organization. "Out of clutter, find simplicity; from discord, find harmony; in the middle of difficulty lies opportunity."

The benefits of organization aren't lost on ASA Alloys, a division of Canadian Specialty Metals ULC. In the early 1990s, the specialty metals distributor adopted 4GL Solutions' Steel Manager III (SM3), a comprehensive business management ERP software developed for the metals industry. ASA Alloys launched the system at its Edmonton, Alberta, facility before

going company-wide in 2007. This year, the company received a software update it says went without a hitch.

Headquartered outside Toronto, ASA Alloys has eight service centers encompassing 400,000 square feet. The stockrooms hold aluminum, stainless steel and aerospace alloys and other specialty metals.

"Inventory control was the primary driver" for adopting an ERP system, says ASA Alloys President Gregg Cousins. "With our old system, reconciliations used to take weeks."

4GL's tailored approach started with an in-depth analysis of the metal center's business from cradle to grave. The team identified ASA Alloys' strengths and areas

where its processes could be improved.

"We're not just a software or tech company," says George Walton, president of the family owned, Stouffville, Ontario-based ERP software provider. "We are a business-minded company. We've had exposure to hundreds of metal centers so we have the field experience to know what works. We're able to bring that knowledge to new customers."

Functionality

For ASA Alloys, 4GL Solutions linked and automated its processes, eliminated bottlenecks and provided functionalities such as data management, integrity, security and manageability in the areas of inventory,



Linear nesting, plate nesting integration and the capability to handle any type of metal product are part of 4GL's inventory control and processing functionality.

sales, quoting, purchasing, processing, linear nesting, production scheduling, picking, shipping, accounting and reporting.

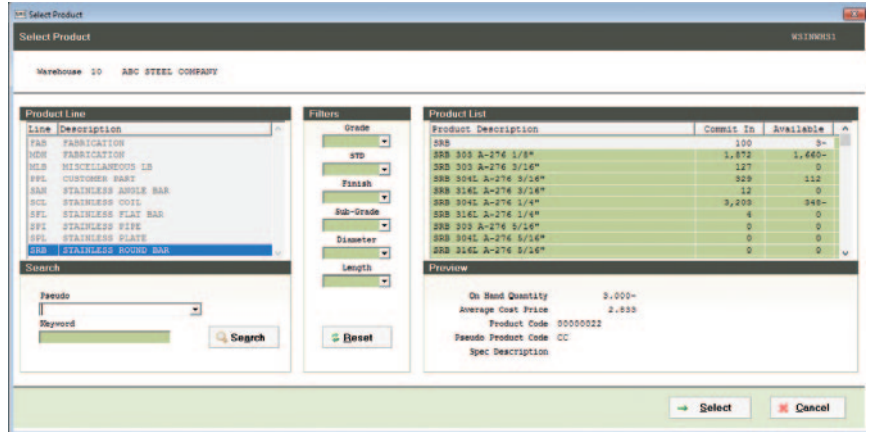
“Initially we had one finance system and one order entry system,” says Cousins. “None of them talked to each other. You have to have the right system to track paperwork. 4GL gave us a solution that links the entire flow of paperwork and puts the information we need—before or after an order—at our fingertips.”

SM3 uses a Windows front end interface for point-and-click functionality and an Oracle database platform. The software's heart is its inventory module, which gives sales personnel instant access to real time intel.

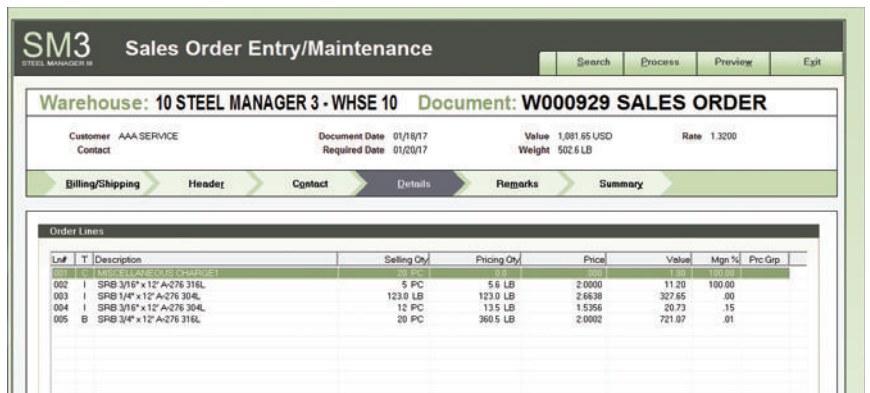
“Information technology has changed exponentially,” says Cousins. “Today we do business online via smart devices. When I walk through our sales office, there is a lot of interaction that goes on which is not taking place on a phone. Having said that, we still get plenty of customers who want to pick up the phone and talk to us.

“Technology has created a more competitive environment,” he continues. “Now customers can get multiple quotes very quickly. That means we have to be faster and more accurate with our responses. We have to be more competitive with every inquiry.”

The software's inventory module performs accurate, real-time inventory and remnant tracking at all locations, a key



SM3's Windows front-end interface provides point-and-click functionality while the software's inventory module gives sales personnel instant access to real-time intelligence.



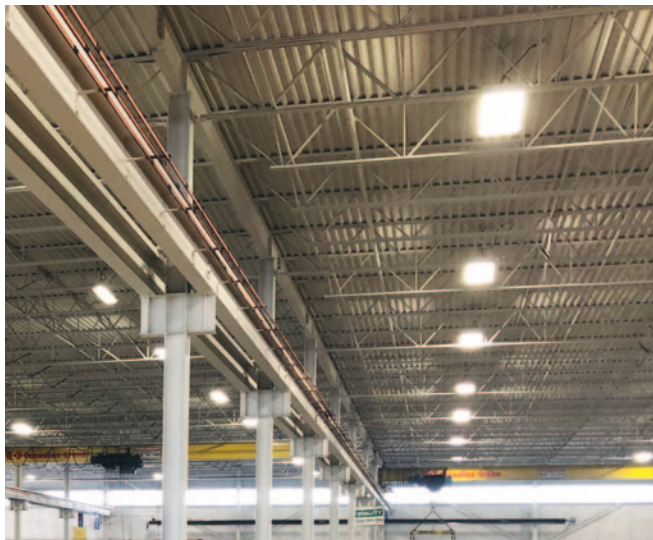
“4GL SOFTWARE HAS PROVED AN IMPORTANT TOOL TO GROW OUR BUSINESS.”

GREGG COUSINS, ASA ALLOYS

component to helping ASA Alloys keep a step ahead of its competitors. Log/tag numbers controlling inventory automatically link to electronic material test reports (MTRs). The time saver, according to Walton, is the ability to automatically print, fax or email certifications with a packing slip to selected customer contacts. Linear nesting, plate nesting integration and the capability to handle any type of metal product using remnant revalue, bar coding, multi-unit flexibility, compatible

product codes, pre-receiving, electronic images of doglegs, a quarantine location, and a consignment inventory feature also support speed to market.

When ASA Alloys upgraded its operating systems earlier this year, it received the newer software version without the need for a patch—a feature that Cousins finds attractive. “4GL is focused on steel distribution and they do a good job of taking



customer feedback for enhancements which they then incorporate into their core system,” he says. “It’s one of their strengths. Some of the improvements came from us, but some of them came from our competitors. Yet we receive these enhancements as a standard product without the need for patches. I’ve been involved with ERP systems where that was not the case. Instead, you had to deal with a large number of customizations that had to be re-interfaced into your system’s core modules.”

4GL closely follows technology in order to spot ways its own product can be improved from an architecture perspective. Recently the software company introduced what it calls the customer portal.

“Lower expenses and higher revenue is

the name of the game for companies like ASA Alloys,” says Walton. “Our customer portal helps by reducing administration costs. For example, customers can pull their own mill reports, view past invoices and track shipping. That capability reduces expenses for companies and increases customer satisfaction because people can sign into their portal to check everything from the status of an open order to getting a quote. It streamlines the sales cycle, too.”

Smoothly running inventories are critical for ASA Alloys. The distributor is AS9120B and ISO9001 certified to supply materials to the aerospace industry. Traceability is strict. “A lot of things have to go right,” says Cousins. “We have to perform inventories quickly and they have to be

correct. We also must have all the systems in place to undergo audits. 4GL’s SM3 supports this process.”

ASA Alloys nurtures a strong culture from top to bottom to exceed customers’ expectations. “We are an entrepreneurial company that makes things happen,” Cousins adds. “If we don’t have it, we’ll find it. 4GL is a like-minded company. Their software has proved an important tool to grow our business and help sales and warehouse staff become more efficient.” ■

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