

LA ROCHÈRE

La Rochère disciplines stock movement using TEKLYNX' IDEAM data collection

Solution Overview

Industry

Glass manufacturing

Application

Stock movement and control

Teklynx Software Products

Label Printing Software
CODESOFT®

Data Collection Software
IDEAM™

Hardware

Wireless Network
Falcon PSC 4420 data collection computers

Software

ACL developer tools
Informix ERP
Microsoft Windows

Partner

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La Rochère is historic. It is the oldest glass manufacturer in France, having been founded in 1475 by Simon de Thysac. Its craftsman heritage has served it well over the centuries. Yet, La Rochère continues to make history. Today, it is the last remaining French manufacturer of glass bricks, tiles, pavé and specialty architectural products. It has accomplished this feat by producing top-quality products and being responsive to its customers. It has also closely managed its manufacturing production to be more efficient in the face of increased foreign competition. One of La Rochère's more recent efforts has been to improve the movement of stock within the manufacturing plant. The company turned to M&N Solutions Logistiques SAS, which partnered with TEKLYNX® for its IDEAM™ wireless data collection system to track product movement in manufacturing, storage and shipping. The result has been better inventory control and reduced errors.

Founded in 1475 by Simon de Thysac, La Rochère (www.larochere.com) is a preeminent French glass manufacturer. Originally a producer of crystal glass, which it still produces, it developed an innovative way to make large window glass by blowing a cylinder of glass and then cutting along its length and then spreading and flattening it. This 18th century innovation led to La Rochère's early entry into the architectural glass industry. The technique was a closely guarded trade secret that was maintained for generations by solemn oath. In the mid-19th century La Rochère was acquired by Francois Xavier Foulliot who introduced the production of glass paving stones and tiles.

This diversified catalog of offerings has served La Rochère well over the centuries. The 20th century, however, brought many pressures on French manufacturers in all industries. Foreign companies began manufacturing similar products and enjoyed lower production costs. La Rochère adapted in many ways to preserve its quality and customer service while maintaining its craftsman approach to manufacturing.

Today, La Rochère is the only remaining manufacturer of architectural glass in France and has become a major exporter of glass to other countries. As the 21st century dawns, La Rochère continues to innovate to maintain its market leadership. In order to build on the manufacturing efficiencies that it has implemented, La Rochère management determined that the movement and control of stock was the next step.



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*Régis Muller
Président
M&N Solutions Logistiques SAS*

Initial proposal too complex/costly

The problem that La Rochère was trying to solve concerned moving stock from glass production areas to other locations in the plant. Product could go to reserve storage, the stock picking area, another production area for fabrication or shipping. Since many of the parts are small, it was a challenge to keep track and efficiently locate them.

Under the old process, all stock movements, whether from production or storage, had to be processed through the picking area. This slowed the process and introduced errors. Also, there was not a system to keep an accurate reserve stock inventory. This resulted in situations when new product was produced, even though the product had previously been manufactured and was already in stock.

The original thought was to implement a full warehouse management system (WMS). However, upon research, it was determined that it would be too complex and expensive to implement. La Rochère turned to M&N Solutions Logistiques SAS for consulting services to help them decide what the most important steps to automate were and how to cost-effectively control its inventory, receiving and shipping.

M&N Solutions Logistiques recommended a simpler solution that concentrated on stock movement and that would phase in shipping and receiving operations at a later date. “We recommended that they start with product movement from one location to another. There was a big difference between the price of our solution and that of the competitors. It was also better in terms of duration,” said Régis Muller, Président of M&N Solutions Logistiques.

Once La Rochère decided to proceed, M&N Solutions Logistiques developed a specification book and met with the company that installed La Rochère’s Informix accounting software. The new stock movement data collection system would both send information to and receive information from the corporate Informix system. This approach would build on La Rochère’s previous implementation of EAN-compliant (European Article Numbering) bar coding driven by TEKLYNX® CODESOFT® label design and printing software.

Standards approach

La Rochère’s Systems Administrator, M. Gilles Ambts wanted to be sure that the data collection system would be standards-based and could be managed and updated by in-house staff or other systems designers in the future. As a result, M&N Solutions Logistiques decided to use AGL software development tools and interface directly with the Informix Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system.

M&N Solutions Logistiques researched data collection technologies and recommended TEKLYNX' IDEAM™ CE and Server data collection products. IDEAM is a wireless data collection system that employs Microsoft CE/Pocket PC-compatible handheld terminals, in this case, Falcon PSC 4420 data collection computers.

IDEAM provides easy development tools for non-technical designers to create graphical data collection applications and it is designed for the wireless networking environment and ERP host connectivity that La Rochère required. It consists of two major components: IDEAM CE, which is the design and testing platform for the user interface that is downloaded to the handheld devices; and IDEAM Server, which is the communications server that supports the wireless devices.

IDEAM is a graphics-oriented application development environment that requires no programming to create powerful mobile applications. Designers can drag & drop user interface fields and form controls. It includes a universal Microsoft Pocket PC simulator that enables designers to preview the look of the application on a personal computer during the development process.

Streamlined process

Now, at La Rochère, the CODESOFT bar code labeling application prints an EAN-compliant label as the product leaves the production line. The label includes text and scanable information that identifies the product and may include the order number and customer information. The product is then moved to one of three onsite warehouses, the next step in the fabrication process, a stock picking area or directly to shipping. The IDEAM system immediately passes the information to the Informix database which is updated to reflect the product location. Managers can view the Informix system at any time to see current stock locations and levels.

In many instances, La Rochère's final product consists of many glass components. If that is the case, the Informix database prints a paper pick list. Based on the information in the pick list, workers locate the parts and scan them with the Falcon PSC data collection computer. They are able to key in additional data using the key pad and select specific functions using the touch pad screen. Once the various parts have been fabricated into the finished product, the new assembly is assigned a new part number and label. The Informix database records the new part and eliminates the component parts from the inventory.

This same procedure applies to product that is taken from reserve stock. All movements are direct from location to location without having to go through the interim step of moving through the picking area.

"We conducted our first inventory since installing IDEAM last August. We never did an inventory as fast."

*Gilles Ambs
Systems Administrator
La Rochère*

Benefits

The benefits to La Rochère have been many. The stock movement function now produces less paperwork, data processing errors have been reduced, stock handling errors have been greatly reduced, and the user-friendly system is easy for employees to learn.

As a result of improved stock movement and control, overall inventory is more accurate. This eliminates product overproduction because La Rochère is now aware of each part in inventory. This enables La Rochère to reduce overall inventory and costs. Also, physical inventory counts do not have to be done as often and, when they are done, they take much less time.

Commented M. Ambs, "We conducted our first inventory since installing IDEAM last August. We never did an inventory as fast."

Next steps

The IDEAM system has been operational since June 2004. The installation, from start to finish including the interface with the Informix system, took only three months. The simplicity, cost effectiveness, and ease-of-use, along with the smooth integration with the Informix ERP system, have delivered the results that La Rochère management expected.

Now that the stock movement and location process has been automated, La Rochère is meeting with M&N to plan the next steps – the shipping operation is scheduled to be added before the end of 2005 and the receiving operation will be added in early 2006.