Pointe Precision flies through manufacturing challenges with Epicor Avanté and MITS Report

POINTE PRECISION LLC

Since 1995, Wisconsin-based Pointe Precision, Inc. has been providing full-service precision CNC machining solutions to top manufacturing companies in aerospace, medical equipment, industrial power generation and other systems requiring components with exacting requirements and minimal tolerances. Pointe Precision-made components can be found in NASCAR braking systems, emergency response vehicles, and a wide range of other systems.

In 2007, that approach to reporting began to fall short of Pointe Precision's needs. "Epicor had stopped further development of Report Wizard," says Sondelski. "With business users demanding more and more from their data, the existing solution just wasn't doing the job." Sondelski also cites a lack of key capabilities commonly found in other reporting environments. "We needed to find another solution."

FINDING AND CHOOSING MITS REPORT

The Pointe Precision team learned of MITS Report—a next-generation, interactive reporting solution designed to accommodate the complex multivalue data structures like those found in Avanté—from a range of sources, including the Avanté User Group and Epicor's Avanté ListServ community. They also saw the solution demonstrated at Epicor's annual user conference—and were intrigued.

> "It's such a fast way to meaningful data from Avanté. It saves us a lot of time, and lets us see information in ways we otherwise couldn't. Once you start using MITS Report, you're hooked."

"Particularly compelling," notes Sondelski "was the attitude of the vendor. All through the demonstration and Q&A session that followed it, the MITS people visibly listened and took notes. It was clear they intended to go back and implement the things people said were important." Sondelski adds that many of the features mentioned that day have since been implemented in MITS Report, and more are in the works.

The team considered the alternative of using one of the other reporting solutions available on the market, using ODBC connectivity to access the Avanté database. But the added complexity of managing ODBC—together with consistent, positive feedback gathered from other Epicor customers using solutions from MITS—convinced Pointe to move ahead with MITS Report in January, 2008.

AN UNCOMMONLY SMOOTH LAUNCH

Both the IT team and the user community enjoyed a smooth transition to the MITS Report solution. Solid documentation and support from both vendors, together with a simple install process, led to a trouble-free install. "The only real work was deciding which report sources to create," says Sondelski. Rather than access operational data structures—and potentially causing performance problems for applications like Avanté—MITS Report first creates separate, reporting-tuned data structures called Report Sources, which are also easier for end users to understand.

Early reporting focused on sales data, but soon the Pointe's IT team had created more than 40 sources, ranging from shop floor management and capacity planning to MRP, along with sales orders, shipping and invoicing. Training was straightforward: "We held one session with end users, showing them how to

access a source, create a report, and add sorting and filtering. That was about it; once people began using the tool, they required very little help from IT." The implementation was later migrated to a (VMware) virtual server environment with no impact on performance.

MITS REPORT 2.0 ENABLES NEW DATA INTEGRATION

MITS's November, 2008 release of MITS Report 2.0 was enthusiastically welcomed at Pointe Precision. "We also use the Advanced Quality Management extension of Avanté," Sondelski explains. "But AQM uses a relational database, not the multivalue format used by Avanté." MITS 2.0 added support for eight new relational databases, and made it possible to integrate Avanté and AQM data in a new report used to analyze nonconformance issues.

Though it added significant new features and a dramatically upgraded look-and-feel, the upgrade to version 2.0 was virtually effortless, taking less than 15 minutes. "Let's just say it wasn't a typical upgrade experience," quips Sondelski. "And with the new features, it was absolutely the right move for us."

RESULTS: BETTER WORKFLOW, FASTER PROBLEM SOLVING, AND ANSWERS ON-DEMAND

Gavin Swigart, Production Control Manager at Pointe Precision, explains the kind of data intensive problems addressed with MITS Report. "We were unhappy with long set-up times on one of our machines. But getting the data we needed to analyze the problem was nearly impossible within Avanté—we didn't even know where to start." IT was able to create a daily report tracking set-up times, then export the results to Excel for further analysis. "Now we're happy with the set-up times—and it would have taken us much longer to solve the problems without the reporting," he adds.

Of the other features version 2.0 added, Sondelski likes the new report parameter capabilities. "We can set up a report that prompts end users for parameters, and that makes it more self-service for them—saving me time, too."

The company is also taking advantage of new reporting related to production scheduling. "We created new reports that let us see what jobs were nearing completion, so we could better target our shipping schedules and set priorities accordingly," says Swigart. "MITS gives us a concise but global view, saving us from carrying huge stacks of paper around to manage production."

In another solution, the company eliminated what could be a three-day wait for critical gauging data from a customer by performing a keyword search on a "notes" field. "This is a good example of the kinds of time savings we get using MITS," adds Sondelski. "When opportunities or issues arise, these ad hoc capabilities can be a real lifesaver."

Swigart sums up the advantages MITS Report brings to Pointe Precision. "In manufacturing and industrial engineering, solving a problem means defining it and measuring it. Before we had the MITS solution, we could get that done, but it took much, much longer and we might not have been as confident in the data. Now we get it done."