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TECHNOLOGIES

Behlen Building Systems Revamps its Approach to Project and Product Lifecycle Management with Autodesk PLM 360

BEHLEN
Building Systems

The Organization

From its world headquarters in Columbus, Nebraska, Behlen Mfg. Co. manufactures and ships products throughout the world. Behlen Building Systems (Behlen), a business unit of Behlen Mfg. Co., delivers pre-engineered metal buildings to clients through a nationwide network of builders.

The Challenge

In the areas of project and product lifecycle management (PLM), Behlen faced several challenges that were decreasing its productivity and affecting customer service levels:

- **Important information was stored in multiple locations and multiple formats.** It was difficult for team members to locate and access information for themselves and for customers. "The sales and engineering teams kept many documents and checklists in paper project folders," said Shane Wemhoff, Team Leader of the Process Improvement Department at Behlen. "Files that were in digital format weren't any easier to locate, since some were stored in a document management system, while others were uploaded to a network drive."

- **The team was stuck on Windows XP.** Some of the software used to run the business had been written in-house. This created a Catch 22 for the team. Hardware needed to be updated, but that couldn't occur until the homegrown software was updated.

- **Sharing information with remote offices was difficult.** Team members resorted to emailing files and pointing colleagues to a shared network drive. With this approach, no one was sure that they were accessing the most current version of files.

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> Shane Wemhoff
> Team Leader
> Behlen Mfg. Co.

The company decided that it was time to investigate a different system for managing product and project information. A new solution would need to facilitate customer service, increase productivity through technology and improved processes, use "out of the box" software, minimize ongoing maintenance, and integrate with the existing JD Edwards ERP system and the Metal Building Software (MBS) system.

Exploring Solutions to Address Product Lifecycle Needs

Although Behlen recognized that they needed to make a change to their PLM processes, the team wasn't sure where to start. One option was AutoCAD and more homegrown software, but that didn't align with the group's objectives. To explore additional alternatives, Behlen engaged IMAGINiT Technologies to conduct a business process analysis.

The IMAGINiT team spent four days interviewing key stakeholders in order to understand each department's needs. The goal of the business process analysis was to review existing processes, identify how systems were connected, and obtain feedback about the desired direction for the business. This discovery revealed that the highest priorities were directly related to process control and process management – not file management as was originally suspected. At the conclusion of the business process analysis, IMAGINiT presented two potential paths:

1. **Update the existing outdated technology platform.** This would require Behlen's staff to update their existing custom developed point solutions.

2. **Implement PLM 360 to displace outdated programs and manage connected processes.** This would involve integration to Behlen's ERP and MBS systems through use of Jitterbit integration technology.

The Solution

"Based on our organization's needs, Autodesk PLM 360 seemed like the best solution. Rather than having a patchwork of paper and electronic files stored in different places, PLM 360 provides a central repository for all project information. In addition, the system allows users to access the system from anywhere, as long as they have an Internet connection," said Wemhoff. These features would enable Behlen to share information easily with team members in remote offices. By replacing the homegrown software, the company would also have a robust technology platform that could be expanded over time.

Implementing Autodesk PLM 360

Once Behlen settled on Autodesk PLM 360 with the Jitterbit integration, the team engaged with IMAGINiT and Autodesk for the implementation. To support the project, Behlen created three teams:

1. **Steering team.** This group included senior management and was responsible for business unit and financial decisions.

2. **Core team.** This team focused on process improvements and included members from the IT department.

3. **Functional team.** This group was comprised of team leaders from the various functional areas.

After the initial scope of the project was established, IMAGINiT and Autodesk spent 3.5 days training developers from the Core team. The Functional and Core team members then mapped the current processes and identified where to begin building. This phase of the implementation took around 2 weeks. Throughout the build process, the Core team engaged in functional testing to ensure that scripting and workflows worked as expected.

The first phase of implementation took around 3.5 months to complete. During that time, three process improvement people and one IT staffer built 16 workspaces. Throughout, IMAGINiT and Autodesk provided consulting assistance. The Autodesk PLM 360 system went live at Behlen in June 2014 with approximately 84 users. The system now houses more than 400 projects.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps

In terms of benefits, Behlen is pleased to have one central location for all project and product data. It is now possible for the main office and remote offices to share information seamlessly. Team members no longer have to hunt down paper folders and paper checklists are a thing of the past. Completed tasks can be documented in Autodesk PLM 360 using states and actions in the workflows. Employees can quickly access the latest versions of all documents and data online.

Looking ahead, Behlen is already planning Phase 2 and beyond for its Autodesk PLM 360 implementation. One of the greatest advantages is that the system offers a platform that can grow flexibly, as the business unit's needs change. Behlen is also considering giving customers access to the system. "Given how successful the project has been, Behlen Mfg. Co. may expand the use of Autodesk PLM 360 to its other business units," said Wemhoff.

For more information on Behlen Building Systems, visit www.behlenbuildingsystems.com

About IMAGINiT Technologies

IMAGINiT Technologies, a Rand Worldwide Company, is the world's largest provider of enterprise solutions to the engineering community, including the building, manufacturing, civil and mapping industries. With over 25 years of experience, and 45 offices throughout North America, we provide the expertise, training and support to help companies realize the full power of design technology, maximize ROI and gain competitive advantage.

IMAGINiT is a leading provider of Autodesk software solutions and the largest North American Autodesk Authorized Training Center (ATC) partner. All of our locations are supported by a vast pool of engineering resources focused on developing real-life business solutions for their local clients.

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