

DPSI Customer Success Story: Sonoco (Mobile)

Overview:

Sonoco, one of the world's largest packaging companies, utilizes iMaint Online to maintain multiple plant locations in 32 countries. Additionally, they opted for iMaint Mobile to streamline their work order processes.

Market:

Manufacturing

Product:



Sonoco's first product in 1899 was a paper cone used for yarn. Today, the firm is one of the world's largest packaging companies, with annual sales exceeding \$3 billion USD. Over 17,000 Sonoco employees work at more than 300 locations in 35 countries.

The Flexible Packaging division produces high-quality graphics on paper, foil and film packages that protect candy, gum, snacks and other products for longer shelf life.

The Sonoco Flexible Packaging plant in Morristown, TN is a 50,000 square foot facility with around 150 employees that produces packaging for many nationally-known brands. Plant personnel work straight days, as well as swing shifts that keep the plant running 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The Maintenance department has eight employees, including Maintenance Manager Mickey Reaves.

Plant Challenges and Solutions

In 2002, maintenance at the Morristown plant was primarily reactive; repairs were made when problems developed. Very little proactive maintenance was being performed, and improvements in availability and efficiency were difficult to achieve. In addition, "The plant did not have an organized inventory system," according to Reaves. "No one knew which parts were in inventory or their value." Incoming parts shipments were charged directly against the maintenance budget, which often created hardships for the department budget. The disorganization also reduced efficiency.

Later that year, Morristown and around 30 other Sonoco plants began using iMaint Online, a Web-hosted enterprise asset management system (EAM) from DPSI. iMaint Online enabled Sonoco employees to access their maintenance management system from any computer with a Web browser and Internet access; the system and database are hosted and maintained by DPSI.

Reaves understood that a step-by-step approach was needed to reap the benefits of iMaint Online. “The first phase of implementation involved our plant becoming more proactive.” Being able to track detailed maintenance records, readings and many other types of data collected from plant assets was another important step.

The maintenance team then turned their attention to setting up an inventory system using iMaint Online’s inventory module. There were concerns, though, that a full-time inventory clerk would be needed and manual data entry could lead to errors. One manual activity—typing data from completed work orders into iMaint Online—was already consuming numerous man-hours each month. That’s when Reaves was introduced to iMaint Mobile.

Going Paperless

In 2004, a team from the plant was evaluating DPSI’s iMaint Mobile software for PDAs, an add-on for iMaint. They were primarily interested in using PDAs equipped with barcode scanners to organize and control inventory. However, when they saw the software’s work order features, they decided to first use iMaint Mobile to streamline their work order processes.

They purchased Pocket PC wireless-compatible PDAs with integrated barcode scanners; each technician was assigned a PDA. All PDAs are connected to Sonoco’s iMaint Online system through a plant-wide wireless network.

Because Sonoco chose to go wireless instead of using traditional PC synchronization, the plant enjoys real-time communication between each PDA and its iMaint Online maintenance management system. This has enabled the plant to implement truly paperless processes for work orders and inventory control, which are already yielding significant benefits.

Wireless Work Orders

Reaves reports that “We’re much more efficient in our work order processes since using iMaint Mobile.”

Prior to using PDAs, technicians entered information on printed work orders, which then had to be typed into Sonoco’s iMaint Online maintenance system. “Now all that is done directly on our PDAs at the work location, and work orders in iMaint are instantly updated.

We save several man-hours a week just from streamlining closing of work orders,” according to Reaves. That translates into an annual savings of thousands of dollars from eliminating just one paper-based process. And Reaves expects to reap even greater efficiencies in other areas.

Improved Productivity and Cost Savings

Using PDAs where work is being done has increased productivity and reduced downtime. Reaves explains that “Each PDA has a detailed list of current PMs and work orders. It’s easy to generate new work orders or PMs on location, or even combine repairs with preventive procedures when the scheduled PM is about to come due.”

“We also get more data and better readings for each work order, which helps us identify repetitive causes through Failure Mode Analysis,” notes Reaves. Plant availability is now significantly higher. The goal for his maintenance department, according to Reaves, is to maintain an availability rating of at least 98%. “Having a hosted solution also provides significant cost advantages,” adds Chambers. “We don’t have the expense of installing and managing the hardware for our new system, and we require fewer staffing resources to support it. The net result is that our overall installed cost decreases.”

Extreme Inventory Makeover

While PDAs and iMaint Mobile were streamlining work order processes, the staff was also completing an inventory control system. Parts were counted, organized and entered into the iMaint Online system. Each location and parts bin was then marked with a barcode. Reaves notes that “We now know precisely how many parts we have in inventory and their cost.” When a technician needs a part for a work order, they swipe the parts bin barcode with their PDA.

“A big advantage of iMaint Mobile for inventory is that when a tech scans a part out, inventory levels in iMaint are immediately updated.

This eliminates the need for an inventory clerk.” “Plus, an engineer troubleshooting a breakdown can instantly know if a needed part is in stock and where it’s located,” explains Reaves. No more than three of any part is kept in stock. To replenish inventory, plant personnel generate a parts usage report each week that shows which parts need to be reordered. In the future, they plan to use iMaint Online to help manage and automate parts requisitions.

Accounting is Impressed

The new inventory control system has even attracted the attention of Accounting. Reaves explains that “In the past, we had to expense parts as soon as they were purchased. Now Accounting has gained enough confidence in the iMaint system to charge items to Inventory; they only charge them to our account when a technician scans them for use on a work order.”

These inventory control improvements are increasing the efficiency and productivity of the Maintenance department, and making it possible to move closer to just-in-time parts inventory.

Additional Productivity Gains

It's too early to accurately measure many of the gains in productivity and efficiency, but evidence for those benefits has been clear. For instance, two simple changes made possible by iMaint Mobile have already yielded significant savings, which has paid for the equipment and software many times over.

More than Just Software

Reaves states that "We're very happy with iMaint Mobile and DPSI. Instead of buying a fixed package and accepting it as-is, we invested in a product that has provided us continuous improvement. DPSI listens to our feedback and implements our suggestions."

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