

CASE STUDY

Improving Efficiency at Merillat



AT A GLANCE:

COMPANY:

Merillat Industries, LLC.
www.merillat.com

LOCATION:

Adrian, Mich.

INDUSTRY:

Custom cabinet
manufacturing.

PRODUCTS:

High-quality kitchen
and bathroom cabinetry.

ENVIRONMENT:

Gentran Integration
Suite 3.1 on WIN 2000.

KEY CHALLENGE:

Streamlining a
comprehensive inbound
order processing
system within GIS.

THE COMPANY: Since Orville Merillat began custom-fabricating kitchen cabinets in 1946, Merillat Industries, LLC, has grown to become the nation's largest manufacturer of cabinets. Today, Merillat has over 4,200 employees and 11 manufacturing plants producing three distinctive lines of high-quality kitchen and bathroom cabinetry.

THE CHALLENGE: The logistics of preparing an order of Merillat custom cabinets are complex – and replicating them in Sterling Commerce's Gentran Integration Suite proved equally challenging.

Orders are received at Merillat in a wide variety of formats and delivery methods, with electronic orders from one of the company's largest customers arriving as a spreadsheet attachment. It is critical to maintain every detail of the spreadsheet order's physical integrity as it passes through Merillat's manufacturing plant. The original electronic order even reflects the sequence in which shipments are loaded into Merillat's delivery fleet.

GIS should have been the ideal tool – yet one year after installing Sterling Commerce's enterprise-wide integration software, Merillat had been unable to realize the benefit of their investment and efficiently process the spreadsheet orders. The complex orders were still being manually entered into Merillat's Purchase Order system.

THE SOLUTION: With 60 percent of Merillat's orders arriving electronically, and an internal staff working to capacity, the company looked for cost-effective integration expertise from an external partner. Merillat Project Manager Christine Flamm hired Oxford Consulting Group to assist in the design, development and implementation of a processing system for the spreadsheet orders.



"We'll choose Oxford again because of their excellent work on the project. They now have a proven track record at Merillat."

(over)

CASE STUDY

Merillat Industries (continued)

ABOUT OXFORD:

Since 1998, Oxford Consulting Group has successfully partnered with hundreds of mid-market and Global 2000 clients to develop, implement and support their technology portfolio. By focusing on sound business strategies rather than short-term projects, we assist our clients in delivering value-based solutions that provide flexibility and adaptability for the future.

THE PROCESS: Oxford first designed an inbound system that automated the import of the spreadsheet into GIS, checking inventory and loading the data into Merillat's back-office system. The process translates the spreadsheet through an ODBC/JDBC map into custom tables within GIS, calling stored procedures which parse and validate IDs. Oxford's streamlined process then converts the complex spreadsheet into a flat file and seamlessly loads it into Merillat's JD Edwards' Purchase Order system.

After completing the original project, Oxford turned their attention to other incoming orders, aiming to restructure them and create one fully integrated inbound process. Debugging as they went, Oxford combined EDI orders with those received via the Web and FTP. Lastly, Oxford built an Order Attribute System, which uses GIS to process orders without valid part numbers. The Order Attribute System was also combined into the new inbound process.

THE RESULTS: Working closely on knowledge transfer as the project ended, Oxford met the challenge of the variety of orders arriving from Merillat's customers. Oxford integrated them into one inbound GIS process that deals efficiently with all the formats and methods by which Merillat receives electronic orders.

Flamm commented: "Oxford worked with our staff so they increased their knowledge and comfort level of the GIS system to the point where they can troubleshoot and correct any issues."

Oxford also brought the project in on time, although Flamm admitted it was "a little over budget." However, as she explained, the over-run was directly attributable to the scope change.

Moreover, this is one budget over-run that paid off. "Oxford allowed us to implement two separate projects and streamline our processing at the same time," said Flamm. Oxford's work at Merillat has positioned the company for the future, allowing them to add further forms of electronic order processing both more easily and more efficiently than in the past.

"We were very impressed with Oxford's problem solving skills — even when things changed mid stream."

"The hand off to our team was excellent. The knowledge transfer was very successful."