

Walinga Inc.

Made2Manage® ERP

Made2Manage Helps Canadian Truck Manufacturer Build With a “Personal Touch”



For nearly 50 years, Walinga Inc. has served its customers with a personal touch. That tradition began when Walinga’s co-founders—two craftsmen from the town of Fergus in Ontario, Canada—began handcrafting wooden truck bodies for local businesses.

Walinga’s founders built their business around the slogan “Building any body for anybody.” And that slogan remains applicable today, even though Walinga no longer makes wooden truck bodies and its workforce has grown to more than 200 people.

Today, Walinga manufactures primarily aluminum truck bodies and trailers for transporting various bulk commodities. In addition, Walinga manufactures pneumatic transfer systems for transferring dry bulk commodities from storage to transport and vice versa. The transfer systems are available as stand-alone products but can also be integrated into the truck body or trailer solution.

Most of Walinga’s customers are in businesses related to agriculture, and they use Walinga’s products—which are now known as engineered transportation systems—to move grain, feed, seed, and other dry bulk material. Although these systems are much more complex than wooden truck bodies, they are custom engineered to meet the individual customer’s exact specifications.

The tradition of offering custom-tailored solutions with personal service remains alive at Walinga primarily because the management of this still-family-owned business wants it that way. But its choice of business information systems makes it possible for Walinga to preserve that tradition while also operating a profitable business.





Custom Appeal

Walinga purchased its Enterprise Business System from Made2Manage Systems, Indianapolis, the leading provider of enterprise applications for mid-market manufacturers. The company's principal product, called the Made2Manage Enterprise Business System, is a suite of software applications that enables smooth integration between all of the functional areas within a manufacturing enterprise—sales, engineering, materials planning, production, quality management, finance, and human resources.

The Made2Manage® Enterprise Business System is designed to run on Microsoft® Windows® operating systems and to take advantage of the Microsoft BackOffice® family of server products. Every application within the suite is Web-enabled, making it easy for its users to implement e-business processes.

Walinga found the Made2Manage software's capability to custom configure a make-to-order product in the Sales and Distribution module especially appealing. "We need the capability to quickly configure custom products in detail as early as possible in the manufacturing lifecycle," says Theo Flach, Walinga's Information Systems Manager. The Sales Order module provides the capability to bring in the appropriate product template—and to pass that data more quickly—to Walinga's engineering department for the necessary detailing required to meet the customer's specific needs. "In essence," Flach says, "this provides a common structure to collect product specification, which removes the need for interpretation and allows engineers to focus on establishing the technical requirements of the proposed solution. The final, detailed configuration will drive the process for scheduling, material planning, and production, and provide the basis for inventory management and cost accounting."

Before it could realize those benefits, however, Walinga had the challenge of reviewing and updating the foundation data and processes required to make product configuration possible. And the Made2Manage system was instrumental in helping Walinga accomplish that goal.

"We had the classic islands of information," Flach says in describing the state of Walinga's information systems before it installed the Made2Manage business system. "We had a job order system that was used to collect labor only. Our engineering data consisted of CAD drawings with BOM, with the Item Master and BOMs also located in a legacy mini-computer system, and in a Microsoft Access database, all being out of synch."

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He adds, “We had two separate homegrown make-to-stock and make-to-order work order systems, both of which had been created with the WordPerfect word processing package. Because of the isolation, it was difficult to keep the data synchronized and up-to-date, which sometimes resulted in delays and confusion on the shop floor.”

Flach says that Walinga attempted to create its own master system to bring all of this information together into an Access database before quickly realizing that, “It would be much easier and more cost-effective to purchase and install an already proven solution.” Thus began a search that resulted in the selection of the Made2Manage Enterprise Business System.

“Walinga was looking for an integrated system to address issues with islands of information,” Flach recounts. “And they were specifically looking for a system that could accommodate a make-to-order manufacturing process, because that is the heart of the business.”

Phased In

Walinga purchased the Made2Manage Enterprise Business System in 1996 and, in the summer of 1997, began what Flach describes as a deliberate, phased implementation process. “We started out slowly, because the staff was going to be required to work in a more structured, uniform environment after so many years of each area following their own separate processes,” Flach explains. “We didn’t want to create a huge culture shock.”

To that end, Walinga launched the first phase of its implementation by installing the Engineering, Finance and Materials Management components of the Made2Manage business system to take immediate advantage of the integrated purchasing, receiving, inventory, A/P, A/R and G/L functions which had previously been done on the aging mini-computer. It also installed the Sales and Distribution component in a department that handles the sales and shipping of after-market parts for its transportation systems.

The second phase of the implementation involved placing the Production module into process all make-to-stock jobs and track labor for the make-to-order jobs. This coincided with the cut-over to the automatic data collection feature within the Production module that uses bar-code technology to aid in tracking the progress of jobs and calculating the labor expended on various tasks. Flach says that part of the project laid to rest any concerns that the introduction of the Made2Manage Enterprise Business System would disrupt Walinga’s business.

“We trained the staff on Thursday and Friday and installed the bar-coding system on a Saturday,” he says. “The workers started using it when they came in the following Monday, and achieved a high level of accuracy in labor tracking with very few complaints. I think that’s because the system was easy to use and has proven to be extremely stable. It’s up and running all the time, the equipment is durable and reliable.”

Financial Relief

Walinga’s shop-floor workers are not the only group that’s happy with the Made2Manage system, Flach says. “Accounting is very pleased with the integration of the Made2Manage business system, because it reduces the amount of manual data entry and manipulation and provides the capability to set up and monitor accounts according to their needs. The fully integrated system provides the capability to calculate and report our true cost of doing business. The parts sales group is happy because they now have a method of reviewing the buying habits of each of their customers. It makes life extremely easy for them when a customer calls to reorder a part without having the part number. Our sales people can simply look into the Made2Manage system’s database and see what that customer bought before and quickly generate a new order—instead of having to stay on the phone and quiz the customer for clues about the part.”

On the production side, the Made2Manage business system is allowing Walinga to move to a more cell-oriented manufacturing style, in which individual work groups manufacture each subassembly for a particular order and then pass those parts onto a final assembly group. Flach says Walinga attempted that before installing the Made2Manage system, but the process was ineffective whenever someone building a particular subassembly was unable to locate a component they needed to complete the task. In those cases, workers would revert to the old practice of ordering the part again or making up the component themselves, which could double the final cost if the component could not be re-used in an acceptable timeframe. “That was okay when there were fewer employees and closer communication,” Flach says, “but we can’t operate that way with a 200-person workforce. There was no way of knowing which jobs were going to various machines at different times, and we would find ourselves retooling machines all day long just to complete individual parts for single jobs.”

With the Made2Manage Enterprise Business System, Flach says, similar jobs can be grouped together and routed to machines that are dedicated to completing certain processes. He says that the system’s inventory-tracking feature has quelled workers’ concerns about getting their jobs completed, because now they can find the parts they need to finish any task they have at hand.

“The Made2Manage business system also has a work-in-process tracking feature that enables workers to find out where a part is in the system if they can’t find it in storage,” Flach says. “This entire system is helping us cut costs.” While Walinga has not measured how much the Made2Manage business system has helped the company save in actual dollars, Flach says the operational changes that the system has enabled will undoubtedly be reflected on the company’s bottom line. “We now have established standards for how jobs are processed, and we have the systems in place to make sure that information about everything we’re doing is kept up-to-date.”

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Final Phase

Currently, Flach says, Walinga is working on methods of organizing its product structures so they can be fed into the system's product configuration tool. That would lead to the final phase of what Flach already considers to be a successful implementation.

"The Made2Manage Enterprise Business System has helped us structure our workflow," he says. "That gives us the ability to document actual costs, which helps to both cut unnecessary costs and price our products more intelligently. It also has allowed us to approach materials management much more scientifically. We've discovered instances in which we were ordering parts in batches of 15 when we used only two of those parts in a year. Things like that help to reduce our overall inventory costs."

Once the configuration capability comes online, Flach believes that Walinga will be able to move closer to a just-in-time method of ordering inventory—because it will know exactly what critical, long, lead-time components are needed to complete an order at the time the order is placed. "Having a good handle on our inventory will also make it possible to do strategic scheduling of our manufacturing process," Walinga says. "We will never be able to stop customers from requesting last-minute changes. That's just the nature of our business, but the Made2Manage Enterprise Business System is making it much easier for us to respond to those changes."

Overall, Flach says, the Made2Manage business system is helping Walinga reduce both its costs and its production lead times—which makes it an easier company for its customers to do business with. "In the end," Flach says, "this system is helping enhance our position as the supplier with the best products and the highest level of service in the industry."

About Consona ERP

Consona Corporation is a worldwide leader in providing customer relationship management (CRM) and enterprise resource planning (ERP) software and services for companies of all sizes. Consona serves more than 4,500 customers worldwide and across a variety of industries.

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