ASC SOFTWARE

FULFILLING THE ON-DEMAND NEEDS OF AN ON-DEMAND SUPPLY CHAIN

Pete Gilstrap, President & CEO
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By Abhinov Punnakkal

"Get closer than ever to your customers. So close in fact, that you tell them what they need, well before they realize it themselves."
- Steve Jobs

Jobs’ philosophy of modern-day business practice is a combination of practical thinking and foresight. The customer wants it all, as they very well should—everything on time, precise, robust, and perfect in every way, and there has been a steady evolution in their needs as well. In warehouse management systems, the initial constructs were all about perfecting inventory control, and now that solution providers have mastered that, customers are moving to the next level. Everything in WMS has a stair-step approach, it is all about quality management and workflow processing, and the end result is ultimately what is delivered to the customer and the contribution toward this from every level. Starting at the top of the chain to the end-user, the suppliers are the ones initiating the product delivery cycle. This chain, which connects all the way down to the manufacturers and distributors, has customers demanding 100 percent reliability, which is the expected standard in warehouse management and logistics. Considering the case of an operations manager at a facility, how does he produce that level of precision?

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An Arsenal of Connected Solutions

Gilstrap states, “We may not consider our supply chain solution an ERP, but we offer customers a fully integrated system with an optional dimensional accounting system behind it that is packed with features such as ACH payments and full automation to the supply chain.”

In addition to their solid WMS portfolio, the company has added API-based IIoT layers, to collect information directly from the machines on the floor. ASC has built out these IIoT functions to make it easy for them to get their mission-critical work done in real time through toolsets that make customers more productive. Typically in the past, WMS solutions have all been deployed through PLC (Programmable Logic Controllers), which are tied to machines and not interfaced to anything else. In today’s world, everything is internet-connected, and everyone wants information at the touch of a button. With advanced connectivity and APIs that are developed into those machine systems, ASC’s solutions can link everything together. The result of that ability is that these systems can be set to pull or send information at certain intervals or based on an event—if a machine is up or down, or production has reached an X amount of goods, or if an error condition has occurred on the machine. As a result, that information is mission-critical to any external supply chain systems.

There are solutions for a variety of different applications that will pull all the necessary information from the trading partners and publish it into ASC processes. This is coupled with additional meta-information and added to the manufacturing layers through the solution’s interface connectors. ASC has the ability to see the Overall Equipment Effectiveness, which is a standard now; it measures the efficiency of the machine’s uptime, downtime, and the quality, among other factors that are important in manufacturing, and displays them on a dashboard that can be viewed from anywhere.

The purpose of the dashboard is to impart real-time visibility into operations, not just from the WMS perspective of raw goods in/finished products out, but the ability to track labor hours, per person, per work order for costing and lean manufacturing. It enables harmonizing information across facilities, providing empowerment for people managing the production line, which is critical information. Fully connected accounting, in particular, is pertinent to the real-time visibility factor, because of the budding industrial on-demand society. Companies today need to have good functional relationships with their client base since they would themselves become the customers to their fellow vendors down the supply chain layers. They want a methodology to help them track that, which is why ASC made their internal-use software available for public purchase, i.e., their specialized supply chain CRM system. It is designed specifically for the sales teams at distribution manufacturing companies, and it facilitates an instant view into their supply chain on a dashboard.

The Makings of an Ever-Improving System

ASC notes that, in the future, the more connected “things” become, the easier they are to support and at the least cost as well. The solution provider listens to customers’ challenges and strives to find solutions to their needs. In Gilstrap’s words, “We follow a methodology to understand their pain points and devise a plan to solve them for that industry and others. Then we fine-tune that so we can see the development.” ASC is coming out with the tenth version of their product based on this method, which will come out this year.

The company’s credo is, “Always look for a better way.” They note that this is most pertinent for their pharmaceutical and food and beverage clientele, where it is absolutely mission-critical, and ASC is now focused on building toolsets that work for every such vertical. For example, what works in pharmaceutical could also work for packaged goods, paper goods, etc. So, when customers ask for specific features, ASC tries to make that request better and they deploy it and make sure that there are no errors. In a world full of solutions, ASC puts theirs ahead, miles as such, even before the client knows exactly what they are looking for.