Pete Gilstrap,
President & CEO

ASC
SOFTWARE

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THE ON-DEMAND NEEDS OF
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SUPPLY CHAIN

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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

J obs' 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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Theirs is a hectic job: having to monitor the quality of products every step of the way, being proactively involved and not just waiting around for the invoices to be processed. "When every consumer is in an "on-demand" society, they want it now, and they want it right, and they want it at 100 percent. This is where we come in; we provide the tools to manufacturers and distribution companies to do that through intelligent processes," said Pete Gilstrap, the President and CEO of ASC Software.

Applicability through the Ages

As an operation-centric supply chain and WMS company, ASC has been around for over 30 years now, honing and augmenting their suite of solutions in multiple verticals and market spaces, all with varied customer demands. "The driver behind our solution was that customers shouldn't have to have different external interfaces from multiple companies, nor different security clearances and interfaces for IT to support. It becomes very cumbersome, and I have personally experienced this for 30 years, working with them," adds Gilstrap.

The world is changing and what companies are doing is changing as well. The options are to either change or fade away—it is just that critical for them. Most clients in the supply chain world may not have a dedicated IT staff as such, and they can't support multiple integrations - they need to be seamless. And in the most practical sense, for a seamless system, there will be only one channel to address in the event of any incident. The idea behind that then, is that if there is an issue with any mission-critical system in logistics, mobility, supply chain, or WMS, its' related accounting may not always be that important. But, if there are issues at any end of the process line, clients make one call and that one call does it all, which is what ASC is in the business of—helping customers. Over the years, ASC has been in situations where the supply chain systems have been working 24 X 7 X 365, but the external accounting system goes down quite often. For those clients, ASC builds the entire functionality into one system, and the idea would be to bring in all the related information for processing, resulting in a total solution. Invoicing and the purchase order modules have always been an option for ASC's 3PL customers for over 20 years, and as of this year, they have added a multi-dimensional general ledger as well.

The company demonstrated the walkthrough of their current version of ASCTrac® WMS to a customer that they had talked to recently. They did not show them all of it, just parts, and their comment was: "This software has everything that I had ever wished for and that I wish I had today; and I wish we hadn't gone with that low-end system in the past, because it has cost us more in time than what we would have invested into ASC." In the conversation that occurred with their sales team, ASC hit the number one slot for them and their customers. They were looking at around a dozen different options before ASC, and then the VP selected ASC.
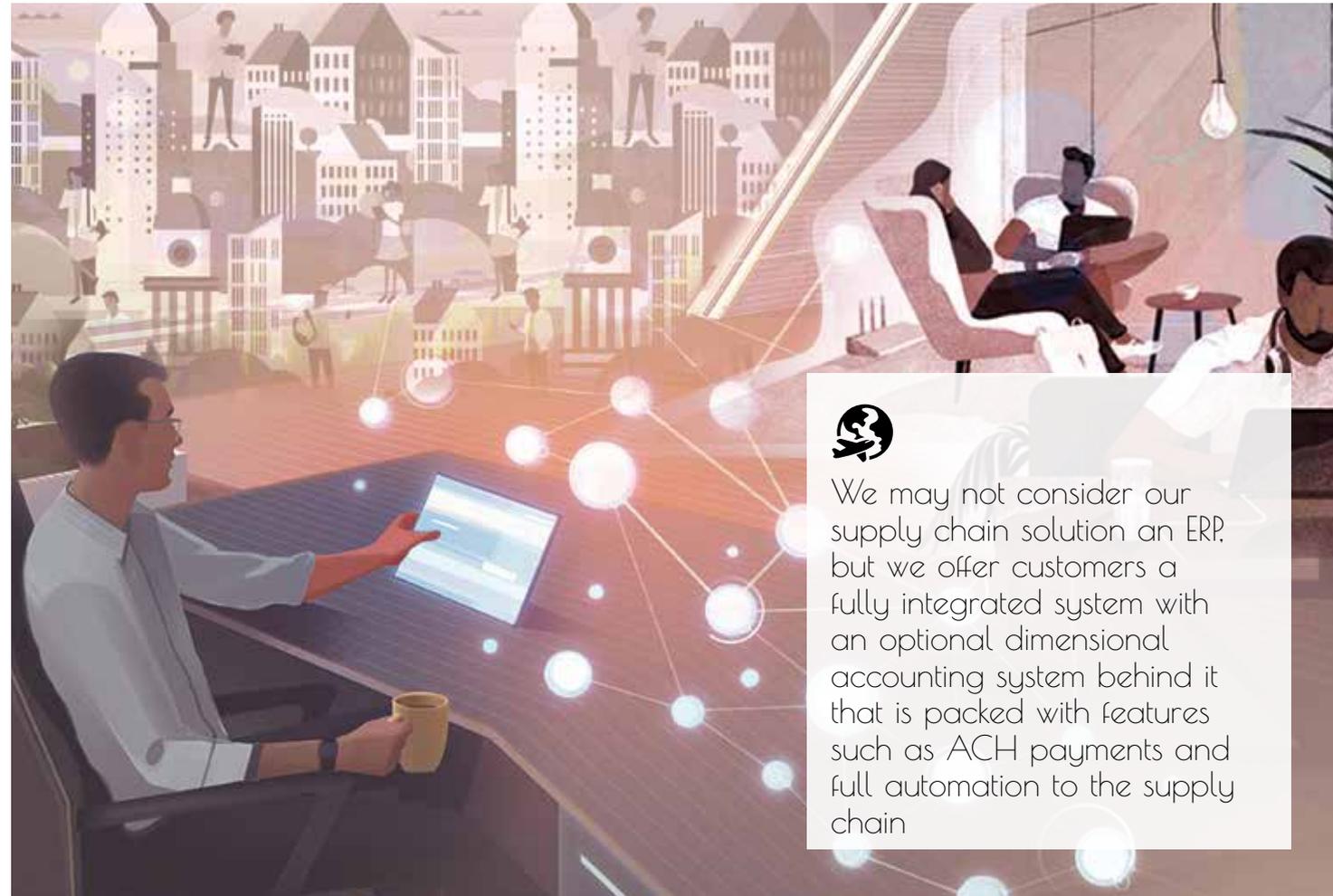
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An Arsenal of Connected Solutions

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 system.

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 nurture the products and oversee 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. **LT**