

Exploiting the benefits of a foundry-specific ERP system

Michael Cilento (Chief Information Officer) and Wendel Niles (Casting Project Manager) discuss the German investment casting producer AAT's decision to install a foundry-specific Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system from Guardian Software Systems Inc.

AAT is a leading manufacturer of precision investment castings for the power generation and transportation industries. Utilising high temperature super alloys, its products enable higher efficiency and cleaner power generation. AAT's customers include some of the leading gas turbine OEMs and service companies across Europe, the USA and the Middle East. Its headquarters are located in Bayreuth, Germany, approximately 90km north of Nurnberg.

CM&DT: How long have you been using the Guardian Foundry System?

We began implementation in November 2011 and went live with the Guardian Foundry System in April 2012.

CM&DT: Why did you choose to partner with a foundry-specific software package?

We had investigated a number of foundry-specific Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems, as well as automotive-specific systems. Guardian best fulfilled our requirements in terms of time frame and cost-effectiveness of implementation, specifications match-up, cost tracking capabilities and most importantly, the flexible and extensive reporting capabilities.

It became clear to us that Guardian company employees are 'foundry people', with an intricate understanding of all facets of foundry operations.

The other ERP packages evaluated were generally automotive-based and would have required extensive modifications to meet the specific demands of a foundry. For example, many



of the foundry-oriented reports provided by the Guardian Foundry System would have required costly modifications with the more generalised automotive-based ERP systems.

CM&DT: In your decision making process, what steps did you take to evaluate all of your software options?

We conducted a preliminary screen based on our technical issues and operational requirements, then assessed those providers who could meet our requirements.

Realising that Guardian was a clear front-runner, we visited a foundry where the Guardian Foundry System had been in operation for several years to observe how the software was utilised in an actual production environment. This step was key in the decision making process. Finally, a recommendation was made to senior management, including the CEO and Technical Director.

CM&DT: What makes Guardian special? Is it the software or the company as an entire entity?

In our opinion, the knowledge base that Guardian associates possess is unparalleled. We were drawn to the fact that Guardian is a small, family-owned company. The developers were always accessible. There were no questions or issues that have gone unanswered or unresolved throughout the implementation process. There was never a delay on the part of Guardian responding to our enquiries. In fact, Guardian made special provisions to be available for support, even though our foundry is seven time zones ahead of its headquarters.

We consider the relationship between AAT and Guardian a strong partnership and the company has gone above and beyond its contractual obligations to devote time and assistance to our employees, without hesitation. Guardian treats us in such a way that we feel as if we are the company's only customer.



CM&DT: Knowing that implementation can be a difficult process, how has Guardian helped you through it?

Given this was the first install of a comprehensive ERP system for many AAT personnel, Guardian was incredibly helpful in structuring our data and organising our processes to ensure successful implementation. The company was a valuable resource, providing several alternatives to handle different scenarios and guiding us, step by step, through the implementation process, which alleviated any apprehension or fear of failure during the transition period. Guardian personnel strived to ensure the implementation process was successful, with minimal effort on our part. They succeeded, without question.

CM&DT: How did Guardian's training meet your needs?

Guardian provided pre-installation training on-site, supplemented with daily telephone correspondence for the past several months. Cognisant of international calling costs, the use of Skype was encouraged to ensure a cost-effective method of communication. As mentioned earlier, being seven time zones ahead, Guardian adjusted its primary support hours to overlap much of our day, without additional support cost. We never sensed that 'money was the primary concern' with Guardian. It was clear that the company's priority was to guarantee that we understood the system so we could use it most effectively.

CM&DT: Did you set any timelines for going live and were they met?

Yes, we established the 'go live' date as 1 April 2012, based on the start of the new quarter and we met that goal. Actually, as far as the operational readiness of the system is concerned, Guardian had been installed and running since late December 2011.

CM&DT: How did you prepare your employees for the transition from the old to the new system?

There was very little preparation. Guardian translated its touch screen interface into German to ease system transition for shop floor workers. Our employees were regularly informed throughout the implementation process and shown how the system would automate and simplify many day-to-day and repetitive tasks. The buy-in was immediate and



there was very little apprehension or push-back.

CM&DT: How has it made the performance of daily activities easier?

The Guardian Foundry System has made it possible for us to track work in process, scrap rates, labour and material costs, operator efficiencies and much more. The company has been extremely helpful assisting AAT to calculate its profit and loss on a timely basis. Overall, Guardian has simplified numerous daily activities throughout AAT. As we begin to utilise more of the system, I expect this list to grow.

CM&DT: Have your employees embraced the system?

Employee acceptance was very high, with few issues. It was apparent that shop floor employees with limited computer expertise learned to use the system quickly. Employees have proposed several recommendations for improvements and Guardian has implemented them efficiently. Employees see the potential of the system and how it can assist daily task performance. They have embraced the system in a short period of time.

CM&DT: What are your future plans for implementing additional features of the system?

We see the potential the Guardian Foundry System offers AAT and plan to employ features that were out of scope during initial implementation. For example, we have established a plan to begin utilising the Quality Module of Guardian within six months. We will use the Certification Module to allow certifications to print at the time of shipment. There are extensive scheduling tools that are yet to be used, such as Casting Campaigns, which help by organising pours based on alloy and crucible type. We plan to implement a number of these tools within 12 months.

AAT is also taking advantage of Guardian's ability to customise features easily within the Guardian Foundry System that will assist us in performing day-to-day operations. AAT is aware of the potential of the Guardian system and its current and future benefits to us. We look forward to our continued partnership with Guardian and commitment to utilising the Guardian Foundry System to its full extent.

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