

Case Study

SEIKI
SYSTEMS

Since implementing the Seiki Scheduler, the Creative Group has dramatically cut lead times and improved its on-time delivery to customers, as well as increasing production capacity

Within its 11,500 ft² facility in Worthing, West Sussex, the Creative Group employs 28 highly skilled staff in a lean manufacturing environment to generate a turnover of £2.8 million. Originally established in 1970, the company initially supported the instrumentation industry. With a background in high precision scientific instrumentation Creative Group has a strong reputation as solution providers. "Many customers give us work that they don't want to do internally, as it may affect their core business. Our reputation is based on handling difficult jobs and getting them right. We work with the customer's design engineers to resolve problems before they commit to production, so we also offer that technical support service," explains operations manager, Mike Dean.

The company's customer base is spread evenly across all of the most demanding industry sectors but while this spread provides some protection against demand fluctuations it does come with its own set of problems, for example batch sizes range typically between 1 and 50 and rarely go over 200. As production manager, Kevin Williams, says: "The high variety of complex work going through the workshop did cause problems for us. We had traditionally used spreadsheets to plan production, but even the best spreadsheet in the world could only cover say two weeks ahead, anything longer and there are far too many variables to consider. We were spending up to 80 hours per week chasing our tails with production planning and still only managed on-time delivery of 52 per cent. This also left no time for us to go and see existing or potential customers."

In October 2010 the software went live for everybody to see and use, since then the improvements to the business performance have been dramatic. "As a business tool Seiki Systems has exposed the opportunities for improvement and has given the top level management the time to focus on the things that can increase our capacity, making us more efficient. This is being reflected by significant additional orders coming from our existing customers because we are now 95 per cent on time with deliveries," says Kevin Williams. With Progress Plus MRP software already in use across the company it was vital that the new scheduling software could communicate accurately. "For us Progress Plus is the right tool to run the administration of the business," Mike Dean points out. "Many people get confused and think that the MRP system runs the whole business, it doesn't. You need a proper scheduling system to run the production of the business and that's what people forget. Seiki Systems provides that link to the shop floor."

The managers evaluated and compared a number of scheduling packages before selecting Seiki. Having looked at software from other leading suppliers in some detail, Kevin Williams had a demonstration of the powerful functionality of Seiki Systems and compared it to these other systems.

Creative Group | Seiki Scheduler

Introducing Seiki Scheduler...

Seiki Scheduler is a complete finite capacity planning solution designed to provide a high level of visibility and control of your manufacturing process.



Seiki Scheduler Features

- Appearance and functionality of a traditional planning board
- Drag and drop technology for 'what-if' planning
- Forward sequential loading of all jobs
- Create a realistic model of your available capacity
- Automated scheduling algorithms
- Simple traffic light indicators to preview consequences of changes to the schedule
- Interfaces to your existing ERP/MRP system or is fully integrated with the Seiki ERP

Seiki Scheduler Benefits

- Reduces outsourcing by maximising the utilisation of your existing resources
- Predict delivery dates with confidence
- Reduce inventory and stock
- Achieve greater manufacturing flexibility
- Identify untapped production capacity
- Manage your production effectively and efficiently with minimal user input
- Increase visibility of your manufacturing process
- Avoid bottlenecks in production



The Creative Group uses Seiki's advanced scheduling software to improve efficiency and capacity



The company has effectively gained 15% additional staff and machine tool capacity without any capital expenditure

Seiki Systems Ltd

Olivier House, 18 Marine Parade, Brighton, BN2 1TL
T: 01273 666999
F: 01273 602564
E: sales@seikisystems.co.uk
W: www.seikisystems.co.uk

Contact Us

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The Seiki Solution

Seiki has over 20 years experience in the development and implementation of real time manufacturing systems that provide live production management information and visibility to maintain a controlled and flexible approach to the manufacturing process.

All the individual modules within the Seiki portfolio are available as stand alone solutions or are offered as an integral part of the Seiki Productivity Suite. Modules include:-

- Seiki DNC
- Seiki SFDC
- Seiki ERP
- Seiki Jobpack
- Seiki NMS
- Seiki Monitoring
- Seiki Scheduler

The modularity of Seiki software provides manufacturers with a flexible solution and progressive upgrade path. One of the key advantages is the ability to address your most critical areas first. Our aim is to work with you to secure your return on investment and support your business as it grows. We offer a complete service including planning, installation, implementation, customisation, training and after sales support.

He says: "The main competitive product was not able to cope with the fast changes in our business where we might make 30, 40 or even 50 in-production decisions in a day. The visibility of data was also poor and could not be manipulated in the system in the way that we needed. People want an easy to use system, that's what Seiki's software does for us - it provides fast, visual feedback. "Similarly, the other strong contender could not be easily manipulated. For example, within Seiki Systems software, if someone is not coming to work for a couple of days we put another person in and change the efficiency literally with a keystroke. Or, if we can't replace that person because they are being deployed elsewhere, we can just take out that work centre for the day, and you are provided with an immediate visual impact of the effects that has on production." It was the ease of use and what the system could do for Creative Group that has made all the difference with the choice. Seiki Systems allows the company to predict problems and also load potential customer capacity for jobs that have a high probability of coming in. Also, if a number of jobs have been quoted for using a standard lead time and the load on the workshop increases the detailed capacity planning in the software provides us with accurate delivery forecasts.

"As a business tool we are looking forward to using it when we achieve our target of filling the order book up to 12 months ahead," Mike Dean says. "Traditionally we only saw 6-10 weeks ahead. Now we have changed the sales operation to fulfil at least 50 per cent of our order book a year ahead. This enables us to plan better and know where we are standing, and Seiki Systems helps us manage the stock of 750-plus items which operate within the kanban systems."

"Prior to going live with the software most of our phone calls from customers centred on them chasing parts that were late. Today, most of the calls are for new enquiries," Kevin Williams states. "Since we have been using the software the additional throughput makes it feel like we have around 15 per cent more capacity, without employing any extra people or investing in any more machines. And that is a conservative estimate because the lead time for a majority of work going through has been cut from 8 to 10 days down to 3 to 5 days. Now customers can get parts to us to be worked at the last minute and we turn them around." There are five discreet sections operated by the company that are scheduled using Seiki Systems. They are currently set at an efficiency of 75 per cent throughout the factory, but

most of them are running at 87.5 per cent with one section highlighted as requiring some engineering input. "At least we now know where to focus our efforts," Kevin Williams says. "There is far more visibility about what work has to be done and the timeframe. A manual system is only as good as the man on the machine and there is little confidence in the amount of work that can be completed. Now everyone has a job queue that is accurate and they are presented with realistic achievable targets."

Seiki Systems has allowed the management to focus the company in the direction they feel best, allowing them to macro manage rather than micro manage all aspects of the business for future growth. It is continually growing in terms of how the Creative Group uses it, bringing the purchase order to invoice processes as close together as possible without compromising on quality. The only way to do that is to have accurate information on what is happening there and then, and what is possible in your manufacturing environment.

Kevin Williams concludes: "Although it is easy to get excited about machining or welding or assembly what we have to focus on is what we are selling, and that is time. It has to be sold in the most profitable manner possible, and what Seiki Systems is doing is giving us a reflection of the time that we sell in a graphical format. How we use and manipulate that time enables us to be more efficient and it also frees up more capacity to sell."

www.creativevacuum.co.uk

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Seiki Systems' suite of manufacturing execution software can be utilised for planning, controlling and improving the works order lifecycle - from top floor to shop floor - of any manufacturing company. Visibility and control of all stages of the manufacturing process is essential. Creating a leaner systematic approach can result in significant capacity and efficiency improvements that can lead to real cost reductions.