



## Able Manufacturing

### Company Facts

- Location: Joplin, Missouri, United States
- Industry: Custom manufacturer for large original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) in a wide range of industries
- Web site: [www.ablemfg.com](http://www.ablemfg.com)

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Jim Schwarz, President and CEO | Able Manufacturing

### Success Highlights

#### Challenges

- Required enterprise resource planning (ERP) to handle highly complex, short run manufacturing environment
- Needed to replace 15 year-old, highly customized, outdated ERP system
- Batch and manual processes limited data integrity
- Lack of electronic data interchange (EDI) integration
- Lack of integrated material requirements planning (MRP) capabilities
- Lack of real-time visibility into inventory

#### Solution

- Epicor CMS

#### Benefits

- Inventory accuracy increased from 85 percent to 98 percent
- Reduced annual physical inventories from four to one
- Dramatic reduction in inventory to virtually just-in-time (JIT) levels
- Integrated EDI, shipping, time and attendance, MRP, and barcoding yield real-time data

Able Manufacturing’s business is the embodiment of complexity. The company supplies heavy equipment OEMs in a wide range of industries with virtually one-of-a-kind large assemblies and engineered systems. In one segment of its business, fabricating and assembling truck cabs and bills of materials (BOMs) consisting of 1,000 to 4,000 component parts are typical. Some of the parts are metal, others are plastic or composite, all of which are fabricated on-site. Components are purchased from suppliers, numbering in the hundreds, requiring 4-6 weeks for delivery, sometimes longer.

“We’re not a company selling garden hoses, where the biggest decision is what color to run. We’re extremely complex and diversified,” says Jim Schwarz, president and CEO, Able Manufacturing. “Our core competency is combining capabilities in metal, plastic and composite fabrication with finish-paint and assembly processes to deliver a custom product. We do some limited, short-run repetitive manufacturing, getting an occasional order for four or five of the same assembly, but generally we operate in a job shop environment.”

### Comprehensive functionality for a highly complex environment

The 50 year-old company has evolved from a manufacturer of bolt-on truck sleepers into a business supplying product for specialty truck, marine, military, mass transit, wind energy and even nuclear and coal-powered energy production applications. A few years into that evolution, decision-makers at Able Manufacturing realized the company’s legacy ERP application, with its high degree of customization and bolt-on functionality, could not support the range of essential capabilities needed without extensive upgrades.

“Everything was a hodgepodge. The system was about 15 years old and hadn’t been updated in seven years, probably because that would have required massive changes to all the custom code,” says Deonna Robertson, IT manager. “It would have taken two updates to get us to the current version and the provider was discontinuing support of the version we were on.” Add to that an annual maintenance cost approaching \$50,000 and the company opted to evaluate other ERP options.

The evaluation criteria focused on full functional integration, from EDI and MRP to financials, while also emphasizing bar-code scanning and inventory tracking capabilities, all of which led to the selection of Epicor CMS. “We simply could not function as the business we are today without Epicor CMS. It is integral to our operations,” says Schwarz, who points out that implementing Epicor CMS coincided closely with the ramp-up of the company’s specialty truck-cab business. “We were in that segment in a small way prior to Epicor CMS, building one or two cabs a day and it was horrendous. With Epicor CMS, we reached a point where we were managing 30 cabs in one day.”

According to Robertson, who joined Able Manufacturing in time to lead the search for a new ERP solution, the degree of manual intervention required by the company’s previous system had rendered its data virtually useless and made the task of tracking thousands of part numbers impossible. “I don’t know how they scheduled production. There was nothing close to real-time visibility into inventory, and maintaining availability and lead-time data on each part was so time intensive that nobody was doing it,” she says. “There was no EDI integration, so when I first got here I spent all my time putting out fires. I once spent a week tracking down and correcting the code on an advance shipment notification (ASN) that didn’t go out.” EDI integration, she explains, is required for international standards organization (ISO) certification, a vital prerequisite to being a supplier to many of Able Manufacturing’s customers.

## Leveraging Epicor integration

The company leverages Epicor CMS integration and real-time data visibility to its fullest. “Now we order components and schedule production directly from each BOM as we receive it from our

customer, whether via EDI or through our engineering department,” says Schwarz. “We run MRP every night, report production and track lead times and costs. With the volume of product coming in and out of our facility we couldn’t do it without Epicor CMS.”

Knowing what to order and when to order it allows Able Manufacturing to maximize inventory turns and achieve nearly just-in-time inventory levels, another marked departure from the past. “Much of what we make is so customized that we might only use a part twice a year, but we used to have to purchase and store that part in inventory as insurance against not having it on hand when we needed it,” says Robertson. “We used to dedicate half of one of our buildings as a parts warehouse and do four physical inventories a year. We now have one row of shelves and it’s not even full. Our inventory accuracy is tight enough with Epicor CMS that we deliver the parts we need directly to the production line.”

Indeed, Robertson says her company has decreased its physical inventories to once annually, and inventory accuracy is at 98 percent, up from an estimated 85 percent with the previous ERP system. She also points to a marked decrease in instances where overnight parts shipments were required due to unforeseen outages as another example of the benefits of Epicor CMS enhanced inventory tracking and planning capabilities.

“We clearly needed to move on from where we were. We needed to evolve,” Schwarz summarizes. “Becoming the highly diversified business we are now required modernizing and extending our ERP capabilities. Epicor CMS fit the bill perfectly.”

## About Epicor

Epicor Software Corporation is a global leader delivering business software solutions to the manufacturing, distribution, retail, and service industries. With more than 40 years of experience, Epicor has more than 20,000 customers in over 150 countries. Epicor solutions enable companies to drive increased efficiency and improve profitability. With a history of innovation, industry expertise, and passion for excellence, Epicor inspires customers to build lasting competitive advantage. Epicor provides the single point of accountability that local, regional, and global businesses demand. For more information, visit [www.epicor.com](http://www.epicor.com).



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