

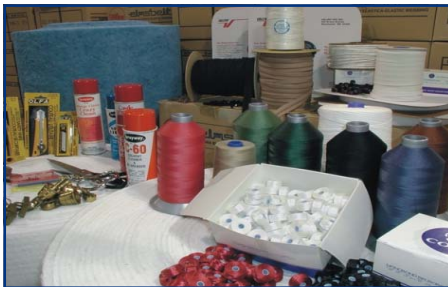
A. A. Oliver & Son

Success Story

One of a series of articles celebrating the success of companies using today's information technology to solve operational problems common within their industries and beyond.



The secret of success for this third-generation distributor to the furniture industry is simple.....identifying the things they do well, then concentrating on doing those things better than anyone else.



A Quick Summary

Company Profile

Two office/warehouse locations in Conover and High Point, North Carolina. Primarily supplying sewing products and soft goods to upholstery manufacturers.

Information System Needs

Their old generation software was primitive and limited. The need was for a system that was fast, accurate, easy to use and provided flexible access to information.

Current Software and Hardware

SouthWare Inventory/Sales, Accounting, ReportMate, Netlink, Assemblies Adapter. Sco/UNIX operating system. Dell server with RAID (Redundant Array of Independent Discs), VPM ("Virtual private network" operating over the internet)

Benefits

"Our customers appreciate that we are efficient, accurate and able to answer questions immediately. We get any information we need easily and quickly."

—Mike Oliver, President

Founded in 1924 by A. A. Oliver, the company has grown consistently over the years. Their products include fiber filling material, padding, thread, zippers and buttons. A new product is faux leather, imported from Italy, which is "just like leather, except for the smell."

A.A. Oliver and Son has strong competitors in their market area, but they have carved out a niche that is both defensible and profitable, offering specialized expertise rather than just price. They have been managing customers' inventories for 30 years, providing "JIT" (just-in-time) delivery before it had a name. Their salesmen go in the back door, count the inventory, and make deliveries sometimes two or three times a week.

Business with one large customer has increased tenfold, with a formal "vendor managed inventory" program that involves stocking their shelves twice a week, and taking responsibility that the right stock is there when needed.

For more information please contact Carolina Cipher at 800-948-9968X5, Email sales@ccipher.com, or visit us at www.carolinacipher.com.

 **Carolina Cipher**
Business Software Solutions Since 1977



“SouthWare had almost everything we needed right out of the box. Anyone can use it easily!”

Mike Oliver, President

How did your company choose SouthWare?

“I started a crusade for new software when I first joined the company. We were using a primitive software package that was a huge handicap. I picked three vendors, Carolina Cipher and two other vendors of very well-known packages. I tested all three packages, actually teaching myself how each would function for our company. I felt if I could not pick it up on my own, that was a problem. I felt I understood SouthWare pretty thoroughly, and knew in advance how I would use it, before we proceeded. It was a very good fit for us, right out of the box.”

What problems did you have with your old system?

“We could not get information quickly about inventory, purchase orders, customer orders, etc. It required a highly trained operator to do anything. It took a lot of time to run reports, an entire week to close the year while the furniture manufacturers were closed. Now we close too, actually saving a week per year right there. We made many errors in billing due to incorrect pricing, causing extra work and customer complaints. We were flying in the dark with our inventory.”

What benefits are you getting from SouthWare?

“Inventory management is a definite benefit. We always know where we stand, and creating purchase orders is easy, because all the information we need is readily available. ReportMate is a miracle for us. We can tweak information any way we want, and look at it the way we want to see it. Everything is faster and easier, and anyone can use it.”

Do you feel your system has contributed to your company's success?

“Definitely. Our customers perceive us as competent and efficient, because we can answer their questions quickly. That makes such a positive impression on them. And we have reduced errors greatly. We used to invoice incorrectly, because price maintenance was so difficult. Now, when we do a quote, the system automatically remembers the override price, and uses it when that product is sold to that customer. And our prices are all based on percentages over cost, so when we get a 3% increase in our cost for a particular product category, one entry changes all the pricing automatically. That might amount to 1000 items, sold at different override prices to 600 customers. All done correctly in a matter of seconds, and it used to take weeks to do it wrong. That's a huge benefit for us.”

What features do you like?

“I have made a lot of use of field-level objects. One application is when you are entering a large number of new records, you can cause the software to automatically fill in fields on each screen that are common to a group of records, and then go on to the next. That's a big time-saver. I also use key-stroke macros a lot to automate certain functions. For example, you can run a whole list of reports unattended, with a macro making all the proper selections for you.”

Tell me more about your system configuration.

“We are on the SCO/UNIX operating system, and it has been totally and completely trouble-free. It never

crashes. We reboot maybe once every 10 months. We have a Dell server in High Point, with “RAID”, which means redundant discs, power supplies, and so on. It has really proven itself. If you have any kind of problem, it gets you back up immediately.”

“We have a “VPN” (virtual private network), with the data encrypted by Sonicwall gateway routers in Conover and High Point. This has allowed us to convert from a dedicated phone line between the two offices, at about \$800 per month, to using a free connection over the internet. An added benefit is that I can log onto the system anywhere in the world that I have internet access. It literally makes no difference where you are, our software operates the same.”

Describe your relationship with Carolina Cipher.

“Actually, we seldom need them now, as we are pretty self-sufficient. I know there is a group of very knowledgeable people there, and if we need serious help pronto, we can get it. We did have a problem recently where our E-mail clogged up the system and shut it down, and Barry Alexander came over after hours and fixed it for us, which we really appreciated.”

What advice could you give to other companies?

“I would advise anyone implementing new software to learn it before they start, and to remain actively involved. No matter how skilled the software vendor is, he cannot know a company like an insider. Careful planning will save a lot of time and result in a better system.”