

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.



A Quick Summary

Company Profile

A manufacturer of high-end upholstered furniture located in Thomasville, North Carolina. Thirty employees, customers worldwide.

Information System Needs

Faced with the looming Y2K crisis, TRS needed to find new software and get it implemented before the year 2000. They also needed software solutions in two critical areas where their old software was lacking, pricing and inventory control.

Current Software & Hardware

KeyMan software modules GL, AP, AR, PO, PR, IN plus Work Orders, Estimating and Standards, Sales Orders. PC network running Windows XP with five to six concurrent users.

Benefits

Reduced order processing time, reduced inventory, improved customer service, reduced errors. Ordering the correct frame finishes and fabrics is a huge benefit.

Comments

"Our frame inventory is a fraction of what it used to be, even though we offer twice as many options!"

-Sumner Finch, President

"Excellence in Style and Design" and "Timeless Quality" have always been the watchwords at TRS Furniture. Since 1985, understanding what buyers of very high-end upholstered furniture want and providing them with it has brought continuing success to this Thomasville, North Carolina company.

A short walk through their spotless factory with President Sumner Finch reveals some secrets as to how this high quality is achieved. The clues include an obviously well organized workspace, experienced long-term employees and the highest quality materials available. Combined with careful planning and execution, the result is a line of furniture that is exceptional for its beauty and durability.

TRS customers are not satisfied with "standard" or "ordinary." They want special finishes, fabrics, trims, pillows and many other special treatments. They may want to match the paint on their walls or the carpet on their floors. Naturally this complicates every step of the manufacturing process including pricing, order processing, purchasing, inventories, scheduling and customer service. But then if it were easy, everyone could do it!

TRS maintains a showroom in High Point, and markets internationally. They utilize eleven independent sales reps, located throughout the country. A substantial portion of their business is international, and they are working to grow it. Countries include Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Mexico, Japan and others. According to Mr. Finch, a major challenge is to find customers who appreciate this level of quality and customization.



Left to Right: Keith Carter attaching buttons. Meticulous craftsmanship requires hours of careful work—Drastically reduced frame inventory, arriving “just in time”—Cutting tables. Each piece is cut individually.—Nails being attached to armchair in perfect alignment

The following interview is with Sumner Finch, TRS President



How have you withstood the threat of foreign competition?

“What we are doing is becoming even more customized, which means more complicated. We have about 30 finishes plus a custom finish program, and will even match the color on your shirt if that’s what you want. Plus endless variations in fabrics, trim and so on. This makes everything harder, but it’s what has protected us so far.”

What’s your biggest problem?

“It’s a societal problem—the availability of quality labor. High school graduates today don’t have the necessary skills. Our employees are great, but it’s difficult to find more like them.”

What operational problems does your company face, and how does KeyMan help?

“Frame inventory, no question. Our frames are made by several frame suppliers, many varieties with many custom finishes. We must accurately control what we have in stock and on order, and what our demand is. With KeyMan, we have dramatically reduced our frame inventory, improved on-time delivery of frames and reduced the number of frames finished early. All this while doubling the number of finishes. And we must track demand and forecast it. The system always tells us exactly what we have and what we need. Can you imagine stocking 150 sofa frames with wrong finishes? That takes a lot of space and costs a lot of money. And any we order in error may become worth nothing. By anticipating our requirements and informing our suppliers, we only need to have a few frames on the floor, with more in the pipeline. That has been the single most important benefit of our KeyMan system.”

What about fabric inventory?

“We are in the fashion business, so it’s vital to see trends and when they change. You buy the wrong thing, and it’s worth only ten or twenty cents on the dollar. We can go all the way back to when we first bought a fabric, and see the entire history, month by month. And we can do it in seconds.”

What other benefits can you attribute to your KeyMan system?

“It has reduced order processing time, reduced inventory, improved customer service and reduced errors. Pricing was all manual because it’s so complicated with all the options we allow. Now it’s mostly automatic. Our costing is now accurate. Receivables is improved, and so is purchasing. The ability to post notes with date and time and track them in the computer, regarding vendor delivery promises is very helpful for us. Customers call frequently about delivery. We used to keep the information on cards and it was very unsatisfactory. Now the system tells us what we need to know.”

How is your relationship with Carolina CIPHER?

“It’s good, but we may be your least profitable customer because we are pretty self-sufficient. CIPHER was a big help in getting us started, and has been responsive whenever I need them.”

What advice could you offer to others looking for new software?

“Know your needs thoroughly, and rank them in importance, being sure the software will handle the essentials well. Don’t expect to find a 100% solution, be willing to accept 95%. Be sure that you or some senior executive is involved throughout the implementation.”