

Engine Power Source

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 Simple Philosophy

"If we're not part of the solution, then we become part of the problem." Based on this simple philosophy first expressed by founder Ney Couick, Engine Power Source in Charlotte, North Carolina, has dedicated themselves to solving customer problems and meeting customer needs. They strive to be the industry's very best supplier, and have experienced phenomenal success since their inception in 1986 as a result.

It starts with the sale

The industry's most experienced and knowledgeable sales representatives are dedicated to matching the right engine or part to each customer's special requirements.....and doing it right the first time. The remanufacturing operation is state-of-the-art, and each process is performed by skilled craftsmen using the latest machinery, and then thoroughly tested to be equal or better than the original manufacturer's specifications. A high level of inventory assures that the right engine or part will be available when needed. The OEM Division is staffed by electrical, mechanical and hydraulic engineers, providing the engineering and design support needed by OEM customers. In all, the company's 82 employees take pride in doing their jobs to the complete satisfaction of their customers.

Creating the environment for a successful business

Ney Couick is now the chairman of Engine Power Source, with his son Steve Couick succeeding him as president. They have been growing at the rate of 15 to 20% per year, and have increased sales from \$16 million to \$24 million with fewer employees. Certainly their vision and leadership combined with the dedication of their employees has created a culture that breeds success.

The essential role of a responsive information system

Scott Wilson, IT Manager, has learned to use the power and flexibility of SouthWare in ways that have multiplied the effectiveness of the Engine Power Source team in all their daily activities. This company is an excellent example of the intelligent use of information technology, actually utilizing it as a competitive weapon.

A Quick Summary

Company Profile

In addition to ranking as the world's largest distributor of Kubota industrial engines, Engine Power Source also stocks other leading brands such as Perkins, Nissan, Deutz, GM and Isuzu. They are also a major engine rebuilder, a supplier of related parts and equipment, and provide service in the field.

Information System Needs

The decision to purchase SouthWare in 1996 was necessary because the company's rapid growth required an up-to-date information system. Some specific needs were robust accounting capabilities, wide choice of modules, and extreme flexibility to handle rapid change.

Current Software & Hardware

Release 9 Inventory Sales, AR, AP, GL, PR, Fixed Assets, Service Management, SalesMark, Assemblies Adapter, Forms Adapter, ImportMate, Report-Mate, Cashflow, Workflow, Extended Data, Excel, ExecuMate, Shipping Interface, Returns Authorization, Collections Adapter. "We have 40 users on a Pentium II 400 server, running SCO Open Server 5 with a Windows user interface. We think it's the best of both worlds."

—Scott Wilson, IT Manager

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Scott, why did you join the Engine Power Source team?

It was an opportunity to help an outstanding company improve by using their IT system more effectively.

What do you mean?

SouthWare is amazingly flexible, with many tools that let you tailor it to your specific needs without custom programming. If users can identify the information they need to be more productive, we can deliver it to them easily.

What is your favorite feature?

Workflow saves the day. I couldn't live without it. Often it keeps the operator from making the wrong move. For example, we have customers whose terms are "credit card." With Workflow, we won't allow closing an order for one of these customers without warning the operator a credit card number is needed. But it still allows an override, because there are occasions when we want to allow other terms. Another example is transferring an item from one location to another. With Workflow we show the status of the item in both locations first. This enables the operator to judge whether the whole quantity should be transferred or not, based on the status. Another example is in receiving, where a message may be flashed that we have authorized payment of FedEx ground, but the vendor may have shipped UPS red at a higher cost, and charged it to us, and we should not accept the charge. There are many other examples of vendors charging us with unauthorized costs, which Workflow saves us from paying. We also use Workflow to save time and reduce errors in entry operations, where we can skip entire sections of a screen, stopping only at applicable fields.

Tell me about other features.

Field filters might be set to accept only "UPS ground", for example, while rejecting "UPS Brown" or "UPS", which are really the same thing. This makes reporting more accurate by eliminating inconsistencies.

"Our inquiry-to-sales ratio has improved 25%, which means we sell five engines where we used to sell four. This is directly attributable to the tools SouthWare provides which enable us to spend our time on what we "should build" instead of what we "could build."

Scott Wilson, Information Technology Manager

Macros is another feature that helps us a lot. We use them to delete line items, or to make other kinds of changes automatically. We had 40,000 parts that were stocked in location 002 (remanufacturing) and needed to change them to 001 (aftermarket sales). All the existing work orders had to be changed accordingly. I was able to do it all automatically with a keyboard macro, and by the end of the day all 40,000 changes were made correctly!

Breakout is very useful. We can "break out" of a process in the middle of a screen, go anywhere else in the system to get information or do a transaction, and return to the place we left very quickly and easily. We actually combine this with custom menus and macros we have created. A salesman may look for a rebuild kit and find it is not in stock. A "control RO" queries the database via a custom menu and macro, causing the database to be queried for all the parts needed to make up the rebuild kit the customer needs. A report is generated to the screen, showing him if the parts are available and in which locations. We also cause it to show additional parts that may be needed but are not part of the kit, so the customer may be informed. The result will probably be a sale and a satisfied customer. Other users have breakouts available to them which display customized menus specific to their job tasks. Breakouts combined with "linking" makes the system remember as you go to another screen the customer, part number, location, transaction and anything else that is applicable. This eliminates copying and pasting or writing down and reentering, making the process infinitely faster, easier and more accurate.

We use ReportMate a lot. One use is to export data into Excel or Access and then reanalyze it. Before purging data from 1996 through 1999 from active history, I used ReportMate to extract over 500,000 records and save them permanently in Access. This keeps them readily accessible, without unnecessarily cluttering the active SouthWare files.

We would be dead without Extended Data." One example is in work orders, where we have added a field where we place an "X" when an order is ready for parts pulling, making it eligible for consolidation with other work orders or sales orders for more efficient parts pulling. That's just one example, we use extended data quite extensively.

How has SouthWare helped to make your company successful?

It has reduced order processing time, reduced inventory, improved customer service and reduced errors. Warning notes and alert notes help us serve the customer better. SouthWare lets you query a customer's history for every part with two keystrokes, while he is on the phone, making us more useful and professional. When replacement part numbers change but there is no difference in the part, we can still identify it by the old designation. This enables us to compare sources when considering a purchase, reducing costs and/or improving service. Our remanufacturing division used to build whatever they "could build", and the distribution division would buy and stock it. We have completely changed to a "should build" process which lets us build only what the system says our customers will need. This means we work more efficiently, reduce our inventory investment, and increase our sales. Our customers are happier and are less likely to call our competitors. We actually sell five engines where we used to sell four, with less inventory!

Please summarize why your system works so well for you.

Flexibility is the main thing, allowing us to do our own customization. Our UNIX O/S is efficient, requiring less hardware by far. We have 1.4 million sales line item history, 3.8 million general journal entries, 4 years of data in all. It takes only 2.6GB of disk and is fast and reliable. With Windows it would take terabytes and run slow. Carolina Cipher is invaluable to me, bailing me out and keeping me from doing the wrong thing. Your people are good and responsive!