

When Less is More...



How the “Perfect-Sized” MRP System Can Help Small Manufacturers

By Thomas R. Cutler

Designed for both commercial and private watercraft, the WaterWatch Multi-bilge Alert with Intelli-Mute monitors up to six separate bilge compartments. About the size of a 3x5 index card, this sleek, stylish boat panel was created for boaters with quality in mind. Featuring a built-in stainless buzzer, the multi-bilge panel has both audible and visual alarms. “We wanted a panel not only created with safety in mind but also something you would not be ashamed of mounting with other gauges,” stated Tony Abbott, President of WaterWitch, Inc.



The E-Z-MRP program helped WaterWitch manage the manufacturing of their WaterWatch boat panels.

Like many other small manufacturers with just a handful of people, WaterWitch has one operator, Abbott, who receives data from, and gives information to, engineering, accounting, purchasing and shipping.

Too small for a conventional ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning) manufacturing system, Abbott chose E-Z-MRP, a \$3000 system that addressed the vast majority of the company’s needs. Abbott pointed out the ease of the program: “I feel the ease of learning the program was key. Most programs offer many more features, but they are not features our small company needs. With E-Z-MRP we can make and adjust production schedules, maintain minimal inventory, and track product costs very simply. One person can do all of this, part time. We kit parts to Mexico, and it is critical that we kit the correct parts without shortages. We feel E-Z-MRP allows us to do this with minimum manpower. It tells us every day what we need to make and buy, which is exactly what we need to know.”

Meeting smaller needs

Abbott’s description of working with Rocky Smolin, E-Z-MRP’s founder, is quite encouraging. According to Abbott, “Other than operational simplicity, the most important requirement is the support you are sure to need. There is no one more willing and capable than Rocky. We have worked with him for probably 15 years, and while we are not easy to support, and he has not given up on us yet.”

Rocky Smolin is considered one of the great champions of the small North American manufacturer. During a recent interview Smolin provided insight into why so many manufacturing software firms have neglected the small manufacturer. “It is a challenge to create a manufacturing system that gives a small manufacturer the information they need, without overwhelming them with the operational complexity and the drain on resources that characterize most MRP and ERP products,” said Smolin.

A three-step process

Making E-Z-MRP usable by people who had no previous background in either manufacturing systems or computers was a three step-process for Smolin.

“First, I had to determine what it was that a small manufacturer really needed from their manufacturing system. And what they really needed to know could be boiled down to four questions:

- What do I need to make?
- What do I need to buy?
- When do I need to make it?
- When do I need to buy it?

“The faster and easier they could get the answers to these questions,” said Smolin, “the happier they would be.”

“Second, the inputs to the system - that is, the total effort and resources required to maintain a manufacturing database - had to be proportional to the size of the company: that is, small. To answer the four basic questions, MRP requires inputs from many areas of the company – engineering, purchasing, production control, shipping, receiving, inventory, etc.

“E-Z-MRP reduces all of the inputs to the MRP formula to Supplies (quantities on hand, on order, in WIP, etc.) and Demands (sales orders, forecasts and dependent demands calculated by MRP). All of the data required to maintain the manufacturing database is done through just two simple screens,” Smolin said.

“So, one person can handle all of the inputs to the database – and this feature was one of the original design requirements back in the mid-80s when all PCs were single-user.

“Third, one of the biggest intimidations faced by a small manufacturer looking at ERP systems is the jargon. The language of manufacturing is almost like slang. It changes every couple of years,” continued Smolin. “MRP used to be Material Requirements Planning. Then it morphed into Material Resource Planning and then ERP. No doubt there is a pedantic distinction among the terms, but that distinction is irrelevant to an operation that only needs to know what to make and buy, and when.”

Finally, Smolin stripped all of the jargon out of E-Z-MRP. Instead of a time-phased procurement schedule, E-Z-MRP has a button on the screen that says “Buy Report.”

“So any one who knows how to run their business in a reasonably organized way can run E-Z-MRP, with no on-site or remote training. Many users never even have to read the manual,” said Smolin.

For small manufacturers, less is definitely more.

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