“The whole idea for us is to keep business here in the United States. The more cost effective we can be in making product, the more business we will get.”

JACK ELTRINGHAM, PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER, AMERICAN PRODUCTS, INC

About the company
American Products, Inc., was founded in 1983, and has earned respected standing among customers for providing turnkey services as an electronic design firm and contract manufacturer. The company specializes in printed circuit board design and manufacturing, cable and harness assembly, and panel and chassis assembly. It also designs and builds equipment control systems.

It partners with OEM customers and non-electronics companies to help them convert ideas into innovative products. Its staff of engineers start with the product functional concept and address all critical issues, including user interface, performance, product environment, price, and regulatory approvals. Design-for-manufacturing (DFM) is a primary principle in all its design and development work.

American Products, Inc. is an ISO 9001-2008 certified manufacturer.

Products & Services
Electronics contract and equipment control system manufacturer, offering turnkey services from design to production.

Target Markets
Serves numerous OEM industries, including industrial products, consumer products, automotive, construction equipment, medical laboratory equipment, HVAC, building management systems, power supplies, and motor controls, among others.

Applications Used
VISUAL Enterprise
VISUAL Easy Lean

Setting the strategy
It is increasingly important in being competitive to provide customers high quality services and cost-effective products. American Products, Inc. (API) has long made that a hallmark of its Central Pennsylvania operations, providing contract manufacturing and design/development services to more than a dozen major OEM industry sectors. It specializes in printed circuit board (PCB) assembly, but also designs and builds equipment control systems.
The company embraced Lean production methods to help bring down costs. Originally, the company created a "visual" scheduling system – converting an entire room to replicate its production process and workflow on a wall board where work was launched and tracked through work centers completely by manual process.

"It took a lot of manpower to do that, though," says Jack Eltringham, API president and founder. Though the existing ERP system at the time wasn’t flexible enough to provide any support for the initiative, the company was still able to improve on-time performance by 10 percent using its manual scheduling system. That was sufficient to glean that there was a lot more room for improvement if they could automate the process. The company applied for and was granted $75,000 through a federal Trade Adjustment and Assistance (TAA) grant for purchasing software and training employees.

"We knew we needed to do a better job tracking work and improving cost accounting in order to get more business. We wanted to be able to cost every individual job on the floor," says Eltringham. "These were things our existing system just couldn’t handle."

Seeing results

June 2010, the company began an extensive evaluation of software packages to find a replacement for its manual "visual" scheduling system. The team originally looked at more than a score of packages, then narrowed the list, and finally selected three vendors to do on-site demos.

"VISUAL ERP covered everything we were looking for. What we really liked about VISUAL was the shop interface," Eltringham says. "It was easy to understand – and easy to use. Ease of use was a big issue for us. We wanted to make sure we weren’t going to put something on the floor that people couldn’t understand. If they didn’t understand it, they weren’t going to use it.

"A lot of the other packages simply used a spreadsheet for scheduling and tracking. VISUAL tracked things the way we were used to doing it," Eltringham said.

"A big factor in cost justifying the project was the payback we projected from VISUAL’s cost accounting functions. That will tell us where our costs are and where we need to trim them. That will definitely help us be more competitive."

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API began system implementation in June 2011. Synergy Resources and value-added reseller (VAR) has played an instrumental role in helping plan and launch the project. “We’ve a small company and don’t have that kind of expertise on staff,” Eltringham says. “The people from Synergy Resources are very good. They’ve done implementations like ours many times, and they know what they’re doing. Their project leader was very good at guiding us through the process.

“There is a Better Way

At Synergy, we work with a core belief. We believe in the customer. We believe that the customer is seeking a better, more collaborative relationship with its business software provider. And a new breed of business software: created for evolution, not revolution. Software that’s simple to buy, easy to deploy, and convenient to manage.

There is a better way.

For additional information, visit www.synergyresources.net