

SYNERGY CASE STUDY



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ELIZABETH KEEFE, DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS, S.I. HOWARD GLASS CO.

ABOUT THE COMPANY

S.I. Howard Glass Co. is an ISO certified and ITAR registered manufacturer in Worcester, Massachusetts. Howard Glass serves over 400 customers ranging from optics to biomedical, electronics to aerospace, and prototyping for research and development. Howard Glass specializes in edge grinding, grinding and polishing, CNC machining, dicing, scribe and break and heat strengthening; stocking a broad range of glass types for optical and industry.

Company: **SI Howard Glass Company**

Address: **79 Southwest Cut-off, Worcester, MA 01604**

Website: www.howardglass.com

Number of Employees: **25**

Products & Services: **Industrial Glass Fabrication**

Challenges

Elizabeth Keefe is the Director of Operations at Howard Glass. In 2012, Elizabeth was tasked with searching for an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution that could automate all aspects of the business. Elizabeth, who had previously worked in the software industry, understood that Quickbooks was useful for accounting but did not offer the manufacturing-specific functionality that Howard Glass needed to become a lean enterprise.

Howard Glass supplemented Quickbooks accounting by using Excel spreadsheets. The solution had its limits. “The financial part of using Quickbooks was fine but using spreadsheets to track inventory and jobs was challenging,” explained Elizabeth. “There was no visibility into the production floor. For example, should a customer call to ask, ‘When’s my order shipping?’ we’d have to put the caller on hold. We’d search through the customer’s files. Then we’d walk around the shop floor and ask the operator for an answer. It was a time consuming and inefficient process,” she concluded.

Materials Requirements Planning (MRP) was another challenge. Howard Glass had become accustomed to calculating its materials purchases by hand. The purchaser would sort through a drawer of open orders and make a best guess when ordering glass for production inventory. The purchasing decision was complicated by the ten categories of glass that Howard Glass uses in its production processes. “Our purchases were often inaccurate,” admitted Elizabeth.

After a thorough search, Elizabeth and the Howard Glass management team selected Infor ERP Visual from Synergy Resources, a leading Infor channel partner. Infor VISUAL is designed for small and mid-sized manufacturers like Howard Glass, offering an incredible breadth and depth of functionality at a highly competitive price.

Results

A few of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that attest to Howard Glass’ success using VISUAL include:

- **40%:** Howard Glass has grown its top line revenue by 40%.
- **ISO:** Howard Glass achieved ISO 9001:2015 Certification.
- **ITAR:** Howard Glass achieved ITAR registration in 2015.

Howard Glass Automates the Shop Floor

VISUAL has provided a powerful tool to help Howard Glass track the progress of jobs on the shop floor. Synergy Resources helped Howard Glass locate workstations on the shop floor so that workers can easily and efficiently clock in and out of work in process. The solution does more than empower Howard Glass to definitively answer the customer’s question, ‘When’s my order shipping?’ Tracking the time spent on specific jobs and work orders has afforded a greater level of insight into labor costs; in turn empowering Howard Glass to quote more accurately, competitively and profitably.

“I love the quoting tool!” said Elizabeth. “VISUAL has all of the relevant information we need including materials, labor and overhead. VISUAL makes the quoting process quick and easy because all of the calculations are in the system. You tell VISUAL the amount of time required and the software automatically runs it through for you,” she explained.

More accurate quoting has had a big impact on the bottom line. Elizabeth said that historically, Howard Glass’ profitability was plagued by peaks and valleys; the amount of profit was often a matter of timing the report. Inputting accurate labor burden and overhead information into VISUAL has revealed how the company can bid more accurately. “We were stunned on how many jobs we were losing money on in the past,” said Elizabeth. “Two years after using VISUAL, our quotes are on-point. As a result, we are consistently profitable as a company.”

MRP Helps Howard Glass Improve Cash Flow

VISUAL has provided Howard Glass with easy, online visibility of inventory, material supply and demand, and production schedules in a single, fully-integrated system.

“VISUAL gave us visibility into our inventory and MRP,” said Elizabeth. “We can see open orders and communicate with our customers about the status of their orders. With MRP, we got to a place where we could calculate the amount of materials we use in a year. The money we’ve saved on MRP alone has more than paid for our investment,” said Elizabeth.

Before, Howard Glass ordered from overseas suppliers and would have to fill a container with technical glass for their diverse customers in the optics, medical and electronics industries. These large, infrequent and expensive orders involved a lot of guesswork. This meant that inventory often sat on the shelf for months, thus tying up many dollars in unproductive inventory.

Now, Howard Glass has improved cash flow management because the company has greater control over its materials purchases. “No longer do we have slow moving inventory sitting around forever because we predicted wrong,” said Elizabeth. “That’s helped tremendously. We used to put extra sheets of glass into inventory but VISUAL has enabled us to see that we don’t need to keep every type of glass on the shelf. Now that we have a better idea of precisely when we’ll need certain materials, we can buy some of our materials from U.S. suppliers; meaning we can restock many items in a matter of weeks. Implementing Just in Time (JIT) ordering has saved the company a lot of money.”

A Lean Howard Glass Attains World-Class Excellence

With VISUAL in place, Howard Glass won approval for a matching grant from the state of Massachusetts to work towards ISO certification. Synergy Resources played a key role in the process. Howard Glass subscribed to a number of Kaizen events led by Synergy Resources consultants. The end result was a leaner Howard Glass operation and a successful ISO certification.

Elizabeth talked about the lean manufacturing initiative. “We had a lot of broken processes throughout our operations,” admitted Elizabeth. “Kaizen events brought all of our employees together to discuss how we can make a better, leaner business. It made the employees know they are appreciated both for their ideas and for simply being who they are.”

The Kaizen events led by Synergy Resources focused on specific areas of Howard Glass’ operation. “We did an organization event that focused on the shipping dock,” recalled Elizabeth. “We improved the process flow so that everything’s done more quickly. In another event, we helped our workers in the grinder area make their jobs easier and more organized. The Kaizen events have had an immediate, positive impact for us,” emphasized Elizabeth.

Another Kaizen event to examine Howard Glass’ quote-to-order process yielded additional benefits. Synergy Resources consultants and Howard Glass employees collaborated to make the process more efficient while preventing mistakes from happening. “In the end, we had a much improved process in place,” said Elizabeth. “It was incredibly effective.”

Elizabeth noted that Howard Glass has benefited from the changes to its information systems and business processes. “In the past three years, we’ve become so busy,” said Elizabeth. “VISUAL and Synergy Resources have been a huge part of our success. It feels like we’ve grown from a mom and pop job shop to a legitimate, smooth-functioning manufacturing company. The sky’s the limit!”

“We have customers who go back twenty, thirty years and more who’ve commented about how much we’ve changed for the better,” said Elizabeth. “Their respect for us has grown. They say, ‘You’ve changed for the better. When we call, you have answers. Your quality and on-time delivery has improved.’”

Howard Glass Sharpens its VISUAL Focus with Synergy Resources’ Services

Staying active in the end user community to learn about the software and industry best practices is a key component of Howard Glass’ infotech strategy. In October, Elizabeth plans to attend VISUAL Focus 2018 in Orlando, Florida where Synergy Resources will deliver content and presentations in partnership with other leading VISUAL channel partners. VISUAL Focus is the premier customer conference focused on Infor VISUAL, bringing together hundreds of people for education and networking with peers.

“We’ve accomplished a lot with Synergy Resources - not just the software but with the consultants, too,” said Elizabeth. “Synergy Resources is a local, small business like we are. All of the consultants physically came here. That’s a big thing. Synergy Resources’ consultants took the time to walk the shop floor. They sat down to talk with our people and really understand what our business is like. You can’t do this over the phone.”

Elizabeth is committed to leveraging Synergy Resources for Continuous Improvement. “We’ll continue to take advantage of Synergy Resources’ services including Kaizen events and lean manufacturing consulting. We’ll keep working on our efficiencies to continuously improve our on-time delivery, quality, and returns. We want to make VISUAL a more powerful tool because we know it will benefit our business,” she said.

“It’s not our desire to be a big company,” said Elizabeth. “It’s simply our goal to the best at what we do. VISUAL and Synergy Resources are doing their part to help us.”