

Suhor and SYSPRO Combine to Bury the Competition

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■ The Company

While Suhor Industries, based in Overland Park, Kansas, could be characterized as a provider of products and services to the funeral and cemetery industries, the company is actually highly diversified. With five divisions and 36 manufacturing locations in 11 states, a more accurate description of Suhor is that of a manufacturer and provider of pre-cast concrete products to a variety of industries, including the funeral, agriculture and construction business.

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- Dennis Welzenbach
 COO, Suhor Industries

When, in 1987, Joe Suhor acquired the company, originally founded in 1933 as a manufacturer of concrete burial vaults, his goal was to expand the company in funeral service but through acquisition and market changes entered other businesses.

Consequently, today Suhor offers a range of concrete-based products, including burial vaults, monuments and memorials, veterans memorials, engraved brick pavers for fund raisers, retaining wall blocks, wastewater systems and agricultural products. What exists today is a multi-faceted corporation which now boasts over 80 sites, including 36 manufacturing locations and 19 warehouses, with 700 employees who process more than 10,000 orders per month.

Suhor’s products are distributed regionally and nationally through diversified channels. Sales of burial vaults are driven by funeral homes. Monuments are sold through owned retail outlets as well as other wholesale channels. Wastewater, retaining wall and agricultural pre-cast products are sold to contractors. Sales of veterans memorials are handled directly by Suhor to communities and veteran groups.

According to Dennis Welzenbach, Suhor COO, quality products backed by quality service has been the primary factor contributing to the company’s success. “We are a national company that responds like a local company, offering consistency and full services through multiple locations throughout the United States,” he says.

■ The Challenge

This ongoing drive toward quality growth and the necessity to become Y2K compliant drove the company to seek a new ERP software solution in 1998. Suhor had been experiencing the problems common to a company using an evolving set of inflexible software programs. Moreover, each location was responsible for backing up its own data. Without a central repository, a location crash and lack of data back-up would result in a loss of the data. According to Jeanette Geiser, Suhor Treasurer, the company quickly realized that future profitable growth could only be accommodated by centralizing financial information and consolidating data for budgeting analyses and control purposes.

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■ AT A GLANCE ■

COMPANY

Suhor Industries

INDUSTRY

Industrial Manufacturing





■ **The Solution**

Suhor established a list of new system requirements. Among these were: a highly automated solution; accounting software to accommodate multiple locations; easy system interface to facilitate data input and extraction by remote users; comprehensive inventory tracking; and system scalability to handle growth. “After a search of candidates, SYSPRO ERP software best met all the criteria”, says Welzenbach. In fact, he says it was SYSPRO’s excellent manufacturing and production control system which first attracted him, followed by the depth of functionality offered by integrated modules and the system’s ability to capture detailed data.

Today, the SYSPRO software operates on Microsoft SQL on a Microsoft Windows 2000 platform and Citrix Metaframe which ties together all Suhor locations through an Internet-based VPN. Of the 64 licensed system users, 50 are online concurrently.

■ **The Result**

Omar McKerrow, Suhor MIS Manager, notes that the company has more than doubled its business since the implementation of the SYSPRO software. “We appreciate the software’s flexibility. It enables us to grow with efficiency,” he adds. He also points out that the software’s ability to accommodate real-time inventory tracking has enabled the company to help minimize inventory. In addition, he reports the software’s ability to consolidate sales information has assisted with forecasting and inventory planning as well as providing an accurate foundation for management decisions. He also lauds SYSPRO’s ease of use features, which, he says, facilitates the software’s use by remote users.

He describes the way the company’s ability to export data to other software to consolidate and centralize customer sales information has helped the business to gain greater efficiency in numerous areas. “Suhor is now in touch with its business as well as customers’ purchasing patterns. Because service is very key, we can gauge its effectiveness by tracking post-sales activity to analyze growth by region and determine whether our customer base is purchasing, what they are purchasing and if the purchasing volume is higher, lower or in line with forecasts.”

Suhor also likes the security afforded by centralized data storage under corporate control. “We no longer have to depend

on regional offices to generate, secure, back up and ultimately send the data to corporate,” says McKerrow.

He reports that the SYSPRO software has also been a big time saver. The sales analysis report which is generated from data exported from SYSPRO is available in two days or less after the month end closing from every location. The report provides accurate, detailed information that allows corporate officers to make better business decisions in less time. Previously, this information and other month-end reporting and procedures required 2 to 3 people keying and exporting information from all locations into Excel spreadsheets. It typically took five days (or 80 hours) to complete. Now, two individuals generate the reports and month end procedures in as few as six hours.

According to Welzenbach, Suhor’s goal is “To try to have a higher sense of getting everything right when providing products and services to customers.” SYSPRO, he says, helps Suhor to meet this goal. Suhor considers itself an industry leader and is determined to maintain this number one position. “Seventy percent of our business is derived from the funeral service industry, where you have only one chance to meet your customer’s needs with no room for error,” he says, adding, “Imagine delivering the wrong product or delivering it late for a funeral.”

Founded in 1933, Suhor’s Wilbert Burial Vault division is also the oldest and largest of its kind. It has maintained industry leadership through service and innovation, evolving new products with styles that reflect the changing culture. One of the more interesting innovations developed by Wilbert has been the customization of burial vaults with engraved scenes or emblems on the carapace (a shield or rectangular plate on the top of the cover) to reflect the personality or interests of the deceased. “Competitors have copied the concept, but this division was the first to provide those options,” notes Welzenbach.

Suhor enhances brand awareness with the wearing of corporate uniforms by field employees and a fleet of trucks which displays the Suhor corporate logo. “It’s really indicative of the company’s commitment to professionalism,” says Welzenbach. He leaves no doubt that the selection of SYSPRO software is one of the keys which furthers this professionalism, promotes efficiency and is a key to better management.