Written by MT Staff
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In February 2000, Corning Inc. acquired Siemens AG's interest in their worldwide fiber-optic cable ventures and merged the businesses into one operation called Corning Cable Systems. The new Corning Cable Systems then announced plans to double the size of its Hickory, NC, specialty cable plant to meet rising customer demand.

For the maintenance staff of the Hickory plant, the expansion posed an enormous challenge. Corning technicians were faced with the task of maintaining more than 300,000 additional sq ft of plant space without compromising the speed or quality of their work. In addition to tackling the mounting workload, the Hickory plant's management needed to improve its ability to capture performance data to generate more accurate and timely records.

To manage its maintenance operations, Corning had been using MAXIMO from MRO Software, Bedford, MA. "Typically, our technicians would walk up to a terminal, write down work order information on a sheet of paper, and then walk off to complete the job. Sometimes technicians would be lined up two or three deep at a terminal to receive their next work orders. We realized there had to be a more efficient way of getting that information into their hands," Lawrence Bugielski, CMMS coordinator at the Hickory plant, said.

Mobile technology is the solution

Corning searched among several technology providers for a solution before selecting SMART from Syclo, Barrington, IL, which is built on the company's Agentry platform and works as a companion to MAXIMO.

Tradesmen use Windows CE-based handhelds as electronic clipboards to send and receive work orders and other workflow data to and from the CMMS. SMART provides data at the point of performance, eliminating reliance on time-consuming paperwork and allowing technicians to accomplish more maintenance tasks in the field. It also combines a variety of communication optionsùwireless, dial-up, or docking cradleùwith synchronization capabilities to ensure that users can work effectively in and out of wireless network coverage.

"After researching the available technology, we recognized that this was the best solution to replace our system of fixed-point access to the CMMS with a more efficient mobile operation," Bugielski said.

The system was up and running quickly for Corning, whose technicians found the solution easy to learn and simple to use. Beginning in August 2000, it was deployed for both Corning's break-fix team and its preventive maintenance (PM) operation.

Swift productivity gains

The installation at the Hickory plant produced swift, measurable results. Using Hewlett Packard Jornada handheld PCs and synchronizing with the CMMS via conveniently located docking cradles, Corning technicians soon recorded a significant increase in the amount of work they were able to complete.

By providing work orders and other important data to technicians at the point of performance, the system eliminated the need for Corning technicians to walk back and forth between terminals to handle data entry, saving them an average of 1 hr per shift. With more time in the field to complete their maintenance tasks, Corning's tradesmen are able to help the newly expanded plant run much more smoothly. The system also eliminated the plant's reliance on costly, time-consuming paperwork, which had slowed its productivity in the past.

"Our decision to combine handhelds with our CMMS has resulted in so much more completed work that it's almost as if we doubled our staff of tradesmen," Bugielski added.

In addition to boosting the amount of work completed, the deployment also has helped Corning ensure that the Hickory plant's operations meet manufacturing standards set by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). The plant's maintenance staff is using the system to perform condition monitoring and rounds-and-readings activities to make sure equipment is running at peak efficiency.

"Our customers are investing a lot of money in the fiber-optic cables we produce and it is essential to assure them that our manufacturing facility meets all of the quality checkpoints," Bugielski said. "By collecting more accurate and timely data, our PM operations have improved and we are better able to meet and exceed our ISO requirements. The system helps us maintain the quality that our customers expect and rely on."

Corning Cable Systems has achieved a number of benefits since deploying the mobile technology:

- Technicians are saving an average of 1 hr per shift by eliminating their reliance on paper work orders.
- The plant maintenance staff has dramatically increased the square footage supported by each maintenance technician.
- After the full rollout, the Hickory team was able to maintain equipment for a plant expansion of 300,000 sq ft with the same number of technicians.
- Tradesmen perform condition monitoring and rounds-and-readings activities to make sure equipment is running at peak efficiency. By capturing more timely and accurate data, management has improved its PM operation and ensured its adherence to ISO operating requirements. **MT**

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