

productive times

Indispensable dispensing

For a company that prides itself on maintaining tight tolerances, tight control of tool inventory was quite another matter for Attica Hydraulic Exchange Inc., Chesterfield, Mich.

“Our tool management system was cabinets with small metal drawers to keep individual tools, index cards with basic tool descriptions and Excel spreadsheets,” said Jerry Kolb, tool and material manager at Attica’s manufacturing division. “We simply had no order and couldn’t really tell where anything was, at any one time, within the shop. Plus, we had workers hoarding their own supplies to ensure they’d have the necessary tools to do their work, but no one knew how much of any one item was used or by whom. Things were just scattered.”

Remarkably, Attica, primarily because of its bevy of skilled in-house technicians, was able to maintain its reputation for rapid turnaround times on even the most intricate pumps, motors, valves, shafts, plates



The CAP tool vending system from MSC enabled Attica Hydraulic Exchange to experience an 85 percent productivity improvement for tool purchases.

and other hydraulic components it offers. The company keeps more than 10 million parts in inventory, mostly made of steel, cast iron or bronze. “To say we push

- END USER:** Attica Hydraulic Exchange Inc.
(586) 949-4240
www.ahx1.com
- CHALLENGE:** Increase profitability by effectively managing tools and other industrial supplies.
- SOLUTION:** A vending system.

SOLUTION PROVIDER:
MSC Industrial Supply Co.
(800) 521-9520
www.mscdirect.com/vending

our equipment to the maximum would be a major understatement,” Kolb said.

Nonetheless, overall profitability suffered because of the downtime caused by searching for tools and management’s lack of knowledge about true cost per part.

The company was already purchasing tools from Melville, N.Y.-based MSC Industrial Supply Co. when Jim Wisdom, Attica’s local MSC Industrial Supply account executive, suggested MSC’s CAP (Competitive Advantage Program) vending system as a solution. Attica installed one locker frame unit and three individual frame drawers, which come in different sizes, can be configured with a varying number of compartments and can be changed to accommodate different sizes of tools as jobs dictate.

“Talk about an immediate fix,” Kolb said. “For one thing, our CAP unit keeps everything in order and fully audits who uses what and when.” The result is Attica

doesn't run out of key tooling because its vending system is programmed to automatically place orders daily. "In short, our system is in set-it-and-forget-it mode."

By ensuring needed tools are always available, hoarding is no longer necessary—or allowed. That's a good thing because when everybody's extras were gathered after the vending system was in-

stalled, the total value of those tools was about \$25,000, according to Kolb.

The vending system also reduced the amount of time Kolb spent ordering tools from 4 to 6 hours per day to less than 3 hours per week—an 85 percent productivity improvement. Because he's also in charge of the preventive maintenance program for the company's entire

campus, Kolb is able to use that freed-up time to help install and repair equipment. "I wear many hats around here," he said.

While testing new products or sourcing for special needs, some manual ordering is initially required. However, the CAP system manages those custom tools. "I get a report every Monday morning telling me what is low from other suppliers," he said.

Kolb added that the vending system is even able to track raw material inventory. "Even though the system is not ordering it, the system still gives us an idea of what we have on hand in the shop."

In addition, the company no longer requires two people per shift to supervise tool

management. "CAP is our purchasing agent," Kolb said. "It always gets things right and never calls in sick."

The CAP system, which is accessed by scanning a bar code on a card or entering a password on a touch screen, limits the access to each bin to only those individuals who need those tools for their particular job. "The mill department doesn't have use for a \$400 diamond dresser so they wouldn't even be able to see that item," Kolb said as an example.

The vending system provides a host of other features, such as storing tools safely in drawers and cabinets so they aren't dropped when dispensed and potentially damaged, but Kolb feels the information it provides is the most important characteristic. "The real beauty of the system is the reporting. For anything you want to know about your tooling and how often things are being used, you can run any type of report imaginable and format it any way you want," he said. That includes determining tool costs for a job, costs per part, tool use for a particular individual and history for inspection equipment use.

"All of which helps in a major way when I quote work," Kolb said, adding that he can assign someone else to track tool use and handle automatic reordering when he's out. "Of course, with CAP's technology, I, too, can remotely access our overall tool-management numbers."

Since its introduction, Attica Hydraulic Exchange has expanded the CAP vending system to include MRO items for the maintenance department and is awaiting delivery of a stand-alone cabinet that will tie into the system.

