

Printing House gets Exact Globe ERP and Preactor combine to produce an excellent result at Altmaster



Altmaster is one of the biggest printing houses in Europe specializing in large format printing, related to outdoor advertising displayed on advertising boards, street poles, walls of buildings, etc. The company works with a wide range of clients both in Poland and abroad (in Germany, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland, Slovakia, Ukraine).

Standard products available from Altmaster include: Billboards (outdoor poster glued on the stand printed in 4-10 sheets), Megaboards (extremely big outdoor poster glued on the stand), Citylights (poster installed in backlit facility), Posters, Banners, Retail Store Displays, Self-adhesive Vinyl Prints.

A comprehensive production process takes into account such stages as:

- the preparation of printing (CTP);
- offset printing,;
- silk-screen printing and digital printing;
- finishing operations such as folding and completion of billboards or banner welding.



Choosing scheduling system

Piotr Jasiński from Altmaster explains the challenges for production scheduling system in his company, and why Preactor has been chosen as their scheduling software:

“Customers of printing houses which specialize in printed advertisements almost always expect a very short period of order delivery, so therefore, production scheduling is crucial. The situation is further complicated by frequent delays in receiving raw materials that prevents the start of printing. Our system of production control that was previously used has not passed a test. It was too much time-consuming, and after taking into account the real change, in practice it stopped working. We needed a system to ensure control of the sequence of orders for optimized and shortened production cycles and the optimal use of machines and to track customer orders giving us a rapid assessment of the estimated date of delivery. It was very important to have the possibility to quickly make the necessary changes in the production model and simulate the effects of those changes. In addition, it was valuable to find the possible due date of a new order for our sales team, even when they are located outside the production facility.”

“Preactor FCS 200 system met our requirements because it offered extended possibilities of planning, and was very flexible with the ability to quickly make the necessary changes in the production model. Probably not without significance is the fact, that at the very first meeting, Prećczyński company demonstrated initial process of scheduling that was well adapted to a printing house.”

Altmaster decided to implement Preactor FCS 200 delivered by Exact Software Poland, partner to Preactor International in Poland. Implementation was made by Prętczyński sp. z o.o., Preactor Network Partner in Poland.

Implementation



According to the original plan, the implementation of Preactor was planned after the implementation of the production modules in Exact Globe (ERP system). However, after the initial workshop on functionality of the system, it was decided that different approach would be used. The Preactor system would be prepared with a simplified model which allowed scheduling of only the printing operations based on data about customer orders entered through an Excel spreadsheet. The second step, after the implementation of the production modules in Exact, would be to integrate Preactor with Exact Globe and allow scheduling of all operations.

The person who responsible for the planning added information related to the process of printing to order data supplied by sales department. This information included:-

- which printing machine can be used for this operation;
- what the time of printing is needed;
- what is the estimated time of finishing operations after printing.

This estimated time was used to calculate the time of the expected completion of the entire order, despite the fact that operations after printing were not scheduled.

An additional burden on the planner was to enter the data in an Excel spreadsheet, however simplifications that were used made it possible to start working with the system quickly and allowed the first schedules to be generated. In this way the best possible tests of system were carried out because real data was used. When it was time to integrate Exact Globe with Preactor, using the Preactor scheduling tool was not a problem for Planner, and he did not require any additional training.

After the implementation of Exact Globe integration between the production module and the Preactor system was prepared it was possible for Exact to send information about production orders with routing, which takes into account operations performed after printing, in addition to printing operations. In this way, the approximate time of finishing operations defined in the Excel spreadsheet has been replaced by the ability to track the exact utilization of each resource which was not possible in the simplified model. Additionally Preactor receives information about completed orders from Exact.

The transition from the simplified model, integrated with Excel, to the detailed model integrated with Exact was made without any major problems. The simplified model was extended with additional resources, resource groups and calendars, plus additional import/export scripts were developed for the new integration.

One of the more interesting modifications that were planned for the development phase was to include into the system additional visualization features for orders, in which graphical input materials supplied by customers were not yet available. The intention of the modification was to create a warning for the planner. If the order to be printed in the near future was at risk because there was no indication that the materials were delivered then an easily seen warning is given. As the bar representing an individual operation on the Gantt chart can be divided into three parts, it was decided that the color of the lower part of a bar would be made dependent on a change of the status in a field called "Are materials from the customer available?". Status as a Yes/No toggle is sent from Exact during order import.

Additionally Preactor, using the appropriate script, calculates how seriously at risk a particular order is, if no input materials were yet available. For example, for orders in which the start time was scheduled in the next 24 hours, and for which there was no confirmation of receiving materials, Preactor changed the colour of lower part of their operation bars to yellow. If there were orders of the same status, scheduled to start in the next 8 hours, then Preactor changed the color of lower part of their operation bars to orange. For those orders, which had indication that the materials are available, Preactor changed the color of lower part of their operation bars to green. The in-built Preactor event script processor (PESP) was used to add these features.

The results of the implementation

Piotr Jasiński from Altmaster comments on results achieved and quality of implementation:

“In line with our expectations the implementation of the Preactor system in Altmaster has enabled us to rapidly and precisely estimate the delivery date of the order. Members of our sales department, even away from our printing house can easily respond to a Customer asking "When can you deliver this order?", on the basis of the actual production schedule viewed on an HTML web page.

There are easy ways to insert changes which means that it is possible to instantly updated the production schedule, based on data from the Exact and taking into account any disruptions in the production process. Additionally it gives us a possibility to plan different scenarios.

Effective scheduling allows us to optimize the execution of the order cycle, eliminate, or at least prepare to deal with, an overload of demand. Having a schedule that is always up-to-date organizes the production process, which is now running in accordance to the sequence that was planned in advance.

Our cooperation with Pręczyński Sp z o.o. during implementation and go-live was excellent. We had a quick response to issues raised by us, openness to make changes in Preactor and willingness to clarify the doubts that emerged which they could easily simulate.”