Company Profile
Wigwam Mills, Sheboygan, WI
www.wigwam.com

Industry: Apparel

Varsity Products: ShipSoft-Parcel™, ShipSoft-Freight™, ShipTalk™, ShipPack™, ShipSelect™

Shipping Volume: 350-500 parcels per day

Number of Shipping Locations: One

Carriers: FedEx, Purolator, UPS

ERP: Infor Style21 (GEAC)

"Varsity has been a great business partner to Wigwam Mills. Although our customization requirements were significantly larger than most, Varsity's commitment to our success was clear throughout the implementation."

—Bill Young, Programmer Analyst

Wigwam Mills Knits a Seamless Shipping Experience with Varsity

Wigwam Mills makes socks—thousands of them every day. They come in a wide variety of colors, sizes, and styles, represented by nearly 2,000 stock keeping units. Wigwam Mills ships 350 to 500 parcels per day from their highly automated 90,000 square foot distribution center in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. UPS is the primary carrier, transporting orders to major retailers including Dick's Sporting Goods, REI, and Sports Authority as well as to several divisions of the military.

In 1998, Wigwam Mills undertook an initiative to ensure that all their IBM iSeries applications were Y2K compliant. This initiative gave Wigwam Mills a chance to replace multiple outdated PC-based transportation and warehouse management systems. The company had one PC system for picking and packing, another for logistics and warehouse location, and a third for order entry and inventory management.

Maintaining multiple PC-based software systems had several disadvantages. Although the initial investment in their PC systems was low, maintenance costs were excessive. Expensive software consultants were required each time a change was needed. To complicate matters, these systems from multiple vendors didn't "speak" to each other. Keeping systems in synch was labor intensive and negatively impacted warehouse productivity. The shipping department needed to shut down an hour early each day to allow time for close-out.

While their PC systems may have been outdated, Wigwam Mills' use of customized radio frequency (RF) technology to pick and pack goods was highly sophisticated. In looking for a new solution Wigwam Mills knew it was imperative that the new software support the company's unique RF processes while adding off-the-shelf pick, pack, and ship functionality. "Getting the source code was very important to us," comments Bill Young, Programmer Analyst for Wigwam Mills. "We needed the reliability of a commercial product with the flexibility of a customized solution."

Wigwam Mills found the flexibility, reliability, and performance they required in a new shipping system from Varsity Logistics. To replace their obsolete ERP systems, Wigwam turned to Infor Style21. Designed to support apparel manufacturers, Style21 was a natural fit with the company's style, color, and size requirements.

Wigwam completed implementation of their new Style21 ERP system in October 1999. That left the information technology team with less than 30 days to build a custom interface between Varsity ShipSoft-Parcel and Style21 and to customize Varsity ShipPack to fit their RF processes. While most Varsity users rely on Varsity's off-the-shelf functionality and standard interfaces, Wigwam customized the software code to meet their unique requirements. "The design of ShipPack allowed us to easily adapt it," notes Young. "We modified ShipPack to work with fewer data entry fields and shrunk the screens to fit a handheld RF scanner."

According to Young, building the interface to Style21 was even easier. "ShipSoft-Parcel is designed to interface with complementary applications and includes almost all the data elements a programmer needs. We built our integration in just two days."

On November 1, 1999, Wigwam went live with their completely new, fully integrated ERP and shipping system. Today, ShipSoft-Parcel and ShipPack are a seamless component of the company's shipping, inventory, and order processes.

Goods are selected from a paper pick slip that is bar coded with the order number. Picked items are scanned and RF is used to instantly report the inventory adjustment triggering automated replenishment. At the packing station, RF is used to identify which order is being packed through an ID scan and to notify ShipPack when a container is full. ShipPack prints a packing slip with a UCC128 number identifying the container. When the container is closed, ShipSoft-Parcel is notified to weigh, rate, and generate a carrier-compliant shipping label. Once processing is complete, shipment details such as the tracking number and freight costs are passed back through the interface to Style21, making shipment history and status information available from any computer terminal with iSeries access.

Wigwam's investment in iSeries-based systems continues to payoff in reduced costs and increased productivity. Seamless integration between their iSeries-based ERP and shipping systems has increased productivity. Time-consuming upload and download processes were eliminated. Now, instead of shutting down their shipping operations one hour before the end of the day, Wigwam completes daily shipping close-out in less than ten minutes. In addition, although shipping volume continues to grow, Wigwam has not increased their shipping staff since implementation in 1999.