



Inventory Management Helps Build a Bridge: Glidewell Laboratories



.....user case study



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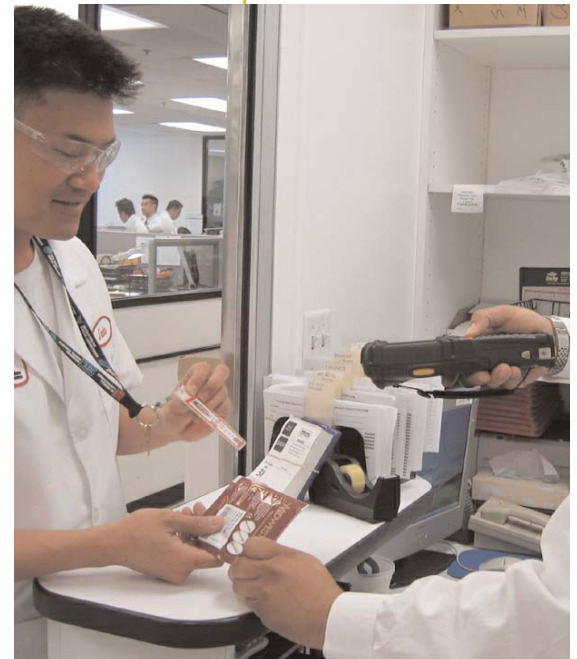


Inventory Management Helps Build a Bridge



According to Glidewell Laboratories, having the right inventory on hand shouldn't be like pulling teeth. Admittedly though, it once was. As in any manufacturing facility, tracking indirect material is a challenge only the brave will attempt to take on. Problems with tracking indirect material can be considered the cavity and implementing a change is kind of like that dreaded trip to the dentist. The sound of that drill, the suction, the mouth rinse...it's a scary process, but when all the pieces are in place, the discomfort is gone and your mouth feels much better on a day to day basis.

Glidewell Laboratories is a manufacturer of dental prosthetics. Crowns, bridges, dentures, sports mouth guards, snore prevention, and night guards are the types of things Glidewell manufactures. Each of the prosthetics are unique to a specific patient. A dentist sends prescriptions directly to Glidewell and they fabricate the needed prosthetic from the patients' impressions and the dentists' prescriptions. Glidewell is one of the largest laboratories of its type having 4 US facilities, 3 international and employs over 2000 people. With an operation of this size and the need for fast turnaround times for everything manufactured, it is critical that inventory is on hand without carrying more inventory than would actually be utilized. Correctly managing inventory and establishing proper order points is critical.



In order to get things under tighter control and rise to the challenge, Glidewell looked to the CribMaster Inventory Management System from WinWare, Inc. in Marietta, GA. According to Dianne Spehar, Purchasing Manager, "We looked at purchasing software for nearly 2 years and couldn't find an application to do what we needed. Then we found CribMaster."

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Spehar explains that the Glidewell needed to find a more accurate way to manage supply room inventory, establish bar code scanning and have a point-of-use distribution option. CribMaster answered all of these needs coupled to a mature, feature rich software backbone. Glidewell has reduced overstock, reduced stock outs, and increased inventory accuracy. "Our average inventory turn is every six weeks," states Spehar. For a facility that is so job specific and under such tight deadline requirements, this is incredibly lean. Spehar continues, "We've shown improvements in inventory accuracy - lots of them. Our stock-outs have gone down by 80%."

Glidewell uses CribMaster to manage production materials, tools (expendable & durable) for production floor and maintenance, and all MIS hardware and software. With CribMaster, operational process improvements have become impacting to Glidewell. Because of the effective means of tracking every transaction and inventory movement, new procedures have been built. Glidewell has implemented CribMaster software or scanners in eleven manned supply rooms and six unmanned. The unmanned store rooms are utilized as satellite stocking cribs. This type of tracking and management is felt across the organization. The proper tracking, replenishment and process monitoring of inventory effects and improves many different parts of an organization, as proven by Glidewell. CribMaster information is viewed by the purchasing, maintenance, MIS, tooth, and fulfillment departments.



Glidewell has also implemented a proactive method for making sure technicians utilize their time where value is evident. It doesn't make sense for a skilled technician to walk to get additional supplies. This is obviously a very unproductive use of their time. With CribMaster tracking all inventory move-

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ment, employees take carts to technicians utilizing a mobile crib method. Inventory is transferred from the main crib to a cart which is identified in CribMaster as a mobile crib. Each of these mobile cribs has bar coded bins and a radio frequency scanner so all transactions are logged real time. Inventory for these mobile cribs is managed and replenished from the main crib daily. All replenishment orders to the supplier are generated from the main crib so that the correct amount of inventory needed to stock the mobile cribs is always available. This method helps ensure the technicians always have the inventory needed to create prosthetics in the fast turn around times demanded. With this enhanced process, Glidewell ensures all inventory is tracked at the time of usage, no matter the crib or method of obtaining the inventory items.

"Being able to track by transaction has made analyzing very simple and has allowed us to figure out difficulties," touts Spehar. Every movement of inventory is logged with a digital record of its movement and is associated with user and cost center information. For example, when an employee walks up to a supply room and requests an inventory item, a supply room attendant scans an employee badge which identifies the employee and cost centers he/she is associated with. The attendant retrieves the item and scans the bar code on the bin containing the item and hands it across the counter. Now is it easily tracked through the system as to who has taken the item, where they are using it and what they are using if for. This type of usage tracking is beneficial across the operation for many different reasons. "We benefit most from tying item usage to what we need and creating purchases based on actual usage," states Spehar. With CribMaster, inventory is managed at the time of use. Replenishment is generated from actual usage demands. CribMaster utilizes a complex Gordon



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Graham EOQ calculation to create order points to ensure inventory accuracy. Glidewell has taken the order calculations a step further, "we have written custom reporting to leverage the CribMaster order quantity," states Spehar. By utilizing the flexible open platform, Glidewell has leveraged the information and applied additional replenishment formulas based on unique needs of their operation.

The ease of implementing the inventory management system and going live has enabled Glidewell to continue expanding the system.

"Implementation from purchase until go-live was a few months. It is a very simple process to get data to CribMaster," Spehar comments about their experience. Recently Glidewell expanded their CribMaster usage to their Costa Rica facility. All of Glidewell's inventory is managed through the same system. All orders generated through the system for Costa Rica is initially shipped to Miami. All of this inventory movement is monitored using CribMaster's TRACK and TRANSFER features. This provides total inventory views and management for Glidewell.



So on your next dreaded trip to the dentist, you may be able to feel a little more comfortable. The sound of that drill, the suction, the mouth rinse...it will probably still be a scary process. Maybe you will feel a little more comfortable knowing that the technician who made your crown was able to focus his talents on creating your prosthetic rather than running to the supply room. He was able to remain focused on the manufacturing task thanks to Glidewell Labs' focus on continual process improvement. After all, running a lean inventory management system shouldn't be like pulling teeth and Glidewell has proven it is not even close.

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