

LSI optimises processes and supply chains to meet market needs

Managing order fulfilment and planning production: the new release of Sinfo One's Si Fides ERP streamlines processes

Interview with Alessandro Bicocchi, Chief Information Officer at LSI

by Veronica Pastaro

LSI

Headquarters

Parma

Business

Manufacturing
flat stainless steel
products

Staff

50

Turnover

Over 65 million
Euro

Ownership

Family-run
Joint stock
company

Made-to-measure sheet metal, bars, panels and belts. Organisation, order, technology. Knowhow in stainless steel production has just turned 30 in Parma, under the banner of LSI, Lamiere Speciali Inox. It was first established in 1986 as a service centre for making flat stainless steel products. Over the years, investments in cutting-edge equipment, experience and professionalism have helped consolidate the company. Today it is a major manufacturer in the Italian and European market: over 65 million Euro in the domestic market and a wide-spread sales network which enables it to meet customer requests in real time. The production plants cover a surface area of 35 thousand square metres and feature innovative equipment. A modern building houses the managerial, administrative and sales offices. In addition, ongoing investment in high-per-

formance production lines allow it to meet market demands. **Alessandro Bicocchi, Chief Information Officer at LSI**, proudly states: "We can consider ourselves a company that has all the cutting-edge technology it needs, from the latest production plants which can receive remote assistance, to a Wi-Fi network which covers the whole plant, not to mention backed-up connection to fibre optics and the modern, recently renovated CED. The last year and a half have in fact brought considerable change and improvement, thanks to the possibility of open dialogue with the company's owners who are very sensitive to IT needs."

Focus on innovation

For LSI, 4.0 Industry is a process that needs to be tackled step by step, with activities and investments that have

ALESSANDRO BICOCCHI



With a background in Computer Studies, Alessandro Bicocchi laid the foundations for his future and focused from the outset on the digital field, developing skills and becoming a strategic consultant for companies worldwide. Today he is the Chief Information Officer at LSI, Lamiere Speciali Inox. His authoritative yet flexible approach, combined with a talent for problem solving, passion and thirst for knowledge, have allowed Bicocchi to make a name for himself in the world of work. He is a sports enthusiast, likes to work out at the gym and never misses a chance to play beach-volley.

been made independently of the incentives promoted by the Government plan. The result has seen it achieve a high level of computerisation. So much so that, as Bicocchi illustrates, “staff working in production can no longer be termed blue-collar workers; they are technicians in their own right, as they work using touch screens”.

The company’s growth has been almost inextricably linked to Sinfo One’s expertise since the ‘90s: “We might well say that we grew up together, thanks to the constant support we received while developing and evolving the management and computer systems,” the CIO admits.

Following the initial adoption of the Si Fides management system, entirely produced by the Parma system integrator, new needs presented themselves. “On the one hand, we soon realised that the best way to rule out human error was to go computerised. On the other hand, however, we steered the change in the direction of dematerialising processes, so that we could go straight into the production plant with computers and create a paperless chain of value,” Bicocchi recalls.

With this premise, in 2012 the RFQ project got underway. Its new assets included the introduction of radio-frequency in the warehouse. The changes were welcomed with open arms, as the CIO of LSI explains: “Unlike the office workers, who generally resist change, those working on the production lines immediately saw the improvements, and were in favour of the project.”

If the market changes, the supply chain has to adapt

In recent years the ever-changing context has radically changed market requirements, which are increasingly geared towards just-in-time production. According to Bicocchi’s analysis, “for LSI it became necessary to be able to provide a faster response, to increase its presence, reduce the risk of error and improve customer service.” Thanks to the support Sinfo One provided year after year, with an approach which revolved around personal communication and constant exchanges of ideas, at Christmas 2015 LSI warmly welcomed the proposal for the new RFQ release to bring significant improvements to ware-



Machines in the plant

house management and production.

The upgrade involved the entire order fulfilment process: “The end goal was to simplify the procedure for entering customer orders, improve production scheduling procedures and further reduce the flow of paper between the office and the plant during the dispatch phase,” the LSI manager explains.

Making older processes more flexible

The general feeling, a view proudly held by Bicocchi as well, is that the new release, which went live in June 2017, has brought considerable benefits: “It has actually made what we were already doing more versatile: in addition to streamlining the processes, it was vital for us to have procedures that could be modified in order to be able to back-track and make changes or correct any errors.”

With this approach, LSI made a choice which goes against the grain of the traditional rigidity of ERP systems. The CIO notes: “We are in fact convinced that flexibility and customisation are two crucial focal points: the management software must also adapt to the needs of the company, not just the other way around”.

The main application of the system’s flexibility has been the “option of working or sending off part of the material, without having to send out the whole

order. This makes for considerable savings in time."

Getting all the employees involved in training

A further element worth noting during the work to change and update the IT systems also concerns the training, led by Bicocchi with Sinfo One consultants, who took part in the staff training: "Week after week, we created a roadmap divided up by sector, office and position, to get everyone involved in the improvements that would be made by the new management software. We wanted to be one step ahead and to work in short bursts so it wouldn't be a burden to daily work schedules, as time spent training takes time away for day-to-day work." In fact the CIO opted not to get all the offices involved together, in order to ensure the processes wouldn't get held up: "It was a challenging approach and one that posed no small amount of problems for managing the training. All the same though, when you have a company with a staff of 50, every person is essential."

Starting in May 2017, the training also benefited from the prototype provided by Sinfo One so they could start

familiarising themselves with the release and its graphic interface. "The first thing to be overcome was habit, a sort of process automatism: the perception and speed used to find resources changed. The training on the prototype was an approach that allowed us to do a kind of validation beforehand and, above all, to be ready for the go-live", the LSI manager sustains. In the weeks after the go-live, Sinfo One continued to work alongside LSI. Each day it was on hand in the company premises with technicians, analysts, consultants for the administrative or Business Intelligence sections, depending on the type of need found.

A one-stop consultant for preventing problems

LSI's strategy is to use Sinfo One as its only consultant for tackling different aspects of computerised management of the processes, starting from the Business Intelligence (BI) systems. "I know companies far bigger than ours which have no idea of what BI is," Bicocchi considers, "while we use it a great deal, with a large amount of reports. As it works with raw materials and has a high pro capite turnover, the cash flow within the company is particularly noteworthy. Financial control through reports and trends in raw materials (nickel and alloy surcharges) are the ABC of intelligent financial planning."

It can in fact prove to be counter-productive to have more than one consultant, because in the CIO's view "you run the risk of them conflicting with one another, and then it becomes necessary to reach compromises to allow information through." The ERP system has now become the linchpin around which the company's processes revolve, and Sinfo One is able to boast, unlike its competitors, in-depth knowledge of the entire production and management system of LSI. "Needless to say, the most critical aspects don't appear when everything is going well, but when something unexpected happens," Bicocchi concludes. "For this reason we think it is necessary to have a back-up plan, and to surround ourselves with partners who are able to handle a crisis, so we can make sure the company never stops. That is the biggest challenge."



The headquarter of LSI in Parma