

Business Drivers

- > Industry Specific Functionality
- > Common Platform for Global Operations and Information Sharing

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— John Sanchez
Chief Financial Officer
Carolina Pad & Paper



Profile in Brief

- > Leading supplier of fashion office and school supplies for women and girls
- > Products available at Target, WalMart, Walgreens and other retailers
- > Global business with headquarters in Charlotte, North Carolina

Efficiency is Always in Fashion at Carolina Pad

Carolina Pad (CP) is a fashion-forward designer, developer and distributor of school and office supplies to Target, Wal-Mart, Staples and other retailers. In business since 1945, CP offers products for school, work and play that are geared toward style-savvy 'tween girls and women. In 2000, the company reinvigorated the brand with vibrantly styled notebooks, journals, organizers and other paper products. Trendy offerings like Hot Chocolate, Prints Charming and Perfectly Plaid have helped garner kudos from Wal-Mart and triple-digit sales growth for the North Carolina-based company. In 2007, CP grew its revenues from \$65 million to more than \$75 million.

IT Investment Lays Foundation for Growth

In the early 2000s, CP began shifting its business model away from manufacturing in favor of offshore sourcing from China, Vietnam, India and Taiwan. The move gave CP the leverage to remain cost-competitive while refocusing attention on design-driven products. But conducting business on a global scale presented new challenges to the more than 60-year-old company.

In 2003, CP began the discovery process to find a replacement system for its poorly performing, green screen AS 400 system. Needed was a user friendly, integrated system with industry-specific functionality that could help drive end-to-end efficiency from importing through customer delivery.

The selection committee – including president Clay Presley, chief financial officer John Sanchez, vice president of operations David Burns, and IT and sales representatives – compared Apprise® ERP functionality against other applications. Apprise won a unanimous thumbs up after a live Web demo convinced the management team the enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution would best fit their needs.

"We knew we needed a fully integrated system to ensure our people in North Carolina and Asia were all on the same platform," said John Sanchez, CFO. "Apprise spoke our language, offered the support we needed, and proved it had the functionality to put more information into user hands."

Application Goes Global – Improves Data Sharing & Efficiency

The system went live during back to school season 2004. Since then, CP has enjoyed user friendly functionality that aids communication between offshore employees in Asia and its North Carolina headquarters. CP's old green screen appearance has since been replaced by Apprise ERP's Microsoft® .NET functionality. The familiar look, feel and navigation of the system helps shorten the learning curve for employees. And Apprise ERP customizable user interface improves workflow efficiency.

"The Apprise ERP application programming interface (API) enables easy information sharing into and out of the system," said Sanchez. "Easy integration with Excel was big. The features in our old system were very cumbersome to use. With Apprise ERP, we easily share system data to more efficiently track open purchase orders, inventory on hand and items we need to purchase with our sourcing partners in Asia."

Business Impact

- > Fully Integrated to Support US and Asia Operations
- > Improved Visibility for Vessel and Container Level Tracking
- > Global Support for Users in their Language and Time Zone

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In January 2007, Carolina Pad made further enhancements to its Asian operations when it eliminated third-party brokers in Hong Kong. Now, CP's Hong Kong purchasing team handles product sourcing and logistics. Employees routinely tap Apprise® ERP product allocation feature to create blanket purchase orders based on forecasted demand. Drop shipment features add another level of flexibility to the system.

Carolina Pad's Hong Kong employees also manage container and vessel-level tracking through Apprise ERP. And the system's unique importing functionality allows them to combine purchase orders into one cargo load to reduce shipping costs. The system also supports multiple currencies.

Local Office Provides Support in Common Time Zone

In January of 2008, CP tapped Apprise® Care Asia for local support. Located in Nanjing, China, the Apprise Asian support team gives companies like CP uninterrupted, 24 hour business day access to system experts that can answer questions or troubleshoot issues no matter the time zone. The office provides an extra level of service for customers operating in Europe, Asia and Australia, and helps companies optimize operations through localized application support for their planning, purchasing, shipping, communication, and other global operations.

"In the past, a Hong Kong employee would call me with system questions," said Frank Crowley, CP's North Carolina-based information technology manager. "Sometimes those calls came in the middle of the night. I logged the inquiries, waited for a response and then contacted Hong Kong with the answer. We used to lose about two days because of the time difference. Now, those inquiries can be logged directly with Apprise Care Asia for same day response."

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For Sanchez, other system improvements can be measured in minutes. As in the 10 minutes it takes him to close the books at month end. "In our old system it took hours to close our books," said Sanchez. "With Apprise ERP, month-end closing is a breeze. Most activity is already done because items and activities are already closed. And I have confidence in the numbers."



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