

Any colour you like provided it is green—wood finishing specialist uses IFS Applications to meet requirements for the protection of the environment

Becker Acroma, Limited of Haverhill, Suffolk, was one of the first UK companies to install IFS software. This application is designed for batch process manufacturing within the chemicals industry.

Becker Acroma wood finishing products complement the quality of kitchen cabinets, bedroom, lounge and dining room furniture. Customer applications range from classic parquet floor tiles to the dashboards of luxury cars. The product is transported in bulk in standard containers from one thousand litres capacity down to a minimum of 2.5 litres. Smaller containers are provided for catalysts and touch-up paints.

The problem

Driving issues in the chemicals industry are the transition toward more ecologically acceptable coatings and application methods. Detailed environmental and safety information must be provided both for internal handling and the preparation of reports to public authorities. Coating suppliers are required by

law to maintain records showing the traceability of their products. There are also specific requirements for labeling the packaging for each delivery consignment.

Becker Acroma's factory at Haverhill includes a fully equipped process trials laboratory allowing customers to fully evaluate new products and the application process before committing to the investment. The facilities can also be used to produce customer samples and mock-ups for marketing and trade show presentations.

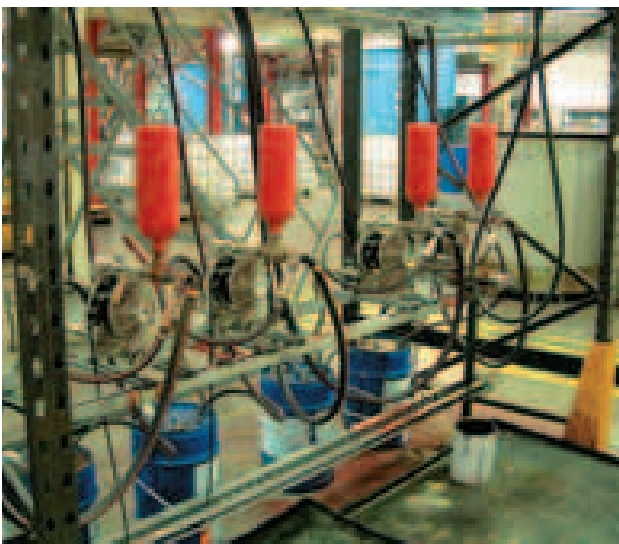
This collaboration has enabled Becker Acroma to build close working relationships with its customers and the company is proud of its long-term associations with famous brands such as MFI, Ducal and Rolls Royce. The use of information technology also plays an important role in keeping ahead of the competition.

The solution

According to Becker Acroma's IT systems manager, Paul Marlow, the IFS system is helping to maintain that edge. "The collaboration between IFS and Becker Acroma has been beneficial to both sides. We have a tailored system geared to the requirements of the chemical industry, and IFS has used this experience to achieve a better understanding of a batch-orientated processing solution," he said.

The production of wood finishes is a complex chemical process involving the blending of different base materials together with catalyst agents. Ingredients include organic solvents; resins and nitrous cellulose used as binders; colour pigments, extenders and other powders to provide bulk; all of which must be recorded within the manufacturing process documentation.

Specific requirements such as these have been incorporated into what has become known as the IFS Chemical Solution, and this is now supported as part of the standard system. "Although there has been some customization specific to our business, our policy is to keep these to a minimum," said Paul.



Looking back at the implementation, Paul sees it as a move into a more open infrastructure that can be adapted to suit future requirements. “We changed the whole structure in one hit—and survived!”

Environmental requirements

All users of factory applied coatings are required to provide their local environmental officers with details of the VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) contained within the materials used in the production process. Known as the mass balance calculation, this effectively accounts for the solvent that has been brought in and used, returned to waste disposal or released into the environment.

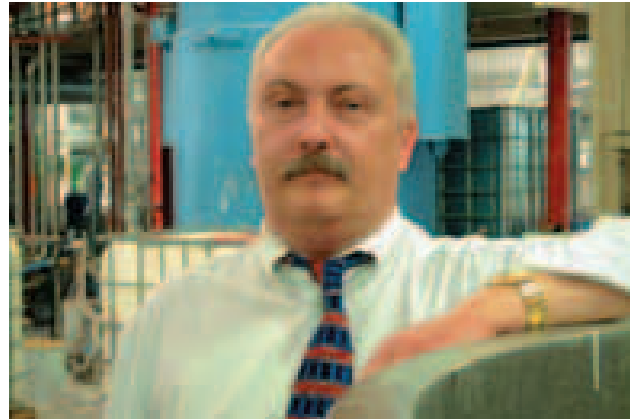
Becker Acroma was one of the first coatings suppliers to provide the basic information as a service to its customers. This continuing support has become a key differentiator in positioning the company as a leading supplier to the industry.

Another development based on the IFS suite is the application of a new program to provide Health and Safety data sheets. These must be supplied to the customer with every new product and updated whenever the contents of the product are changed. The information is backed by product labeling for every batch and delivery consignment. Labeling is crucial as this provides the information required by emergency services in the event of an accident, spillage or a fire involving these materials.

The despatch system, set up to display the environmental symbol as a graphic object, will be printed within a third orange box on the product label. “We can change the labels to display whatever is needed plus any other information we see as being required by our customers,” said Paul Marlow.

Benefits

The Becker Acroma system currently supports up to 60 concurrent users. The database is run over a frame



relay to an HP UX machine located at the group headquarters in Sweden.

This arrangement allows the subsidiary companies to fully exploit the system functionality. “With such a lot of information in the system, we have many requests to provide different interpretations. Most of these assignments are for the analysis of the data rather than actual reporting itself.”

Examples include quality assessments, monitoring service levels, the analysis of the data, and periodically checking that the data are being entered in the correct places in the correct way. The IFS software is also being used to support accreditation against the new quality/environmental performance standard ISO 14001.

The standard, focusing on traceability and documentation, is expected to become a key requirement for the future supply of wood finishing materials. As a leader in this field, Becker Acroma expects to strengthen its competitive advantage by being one of the first suppliers to implement the new standard.

In addition to routine business management the IFS system supports the legal requirements for the protection of the environment. These are ongoing, and new standards are also being introduced for managing quality/environmental performance.