Charles Wells Brewery

Helping to roll out the barrels 24/7 – *bottles and cans as well!*

Background

Bedford-based Charles Wells is the largest family-run beer and brewing business in the country and a recipient of the Queen's Award for Export Achievement. With success founded on quality, innovation and social responsibility, it has global brands and an international outreach. Charles Wells brews over 300,000 gallons per week of ales and lagers, packaging them into kegs, casks, bottles and cans.

Charles Wells was one of the first companies to adopt computerised maintenance management over 20 years ago and still uses the latest-generation of that system – FrontLine Maintenance Management from Shire. FrontLine is used to help ensure equipment availability at every stage of the brewing and packaging processes.

Needs

Charles Wells has aggressive business intentions and required a 30% increase in product output from a switch to 24/7 production. This removed the luxury of opportunity planned maintenance at weekends and placed intense emphasis on plant running reliability and uptime. To contain costs and maximise business advantage, an increase in maintenance effectiveness and efficiency was also an essential part of the challenging transition.

Solution

The required new maintenance response included an upgrade to mobile, paperless asset management using FrontLine's easy add-on HandiWorks and HandiParts modules. The new modules eliminate paperwork by allowing engineers on the floor to communicate remotely with the FrontLine system - so also saving time, increasing data accuracy and the immediacy of management information.

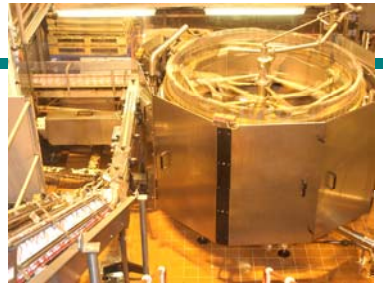
Engineering Administrator Graham Walker explains: "With the new handhelds, communication to and from the engineering teams is faster and I get almost immediate confirmation that a task is finished, together with additional comments from the engineer."

To start with, the Brewhouse and Electrical teams were provided with twelve handheld PDAs and undertook a half-day training session. During the initial trial, Walker calculated there was a measurable increase in productivity of 6%, plus a 10% increase in the reporting of corrective maintenance tasks - identified and completed by engineers during their routine work rounds.

With barcode scanning linking back to FrontLine, stock numbers can be added to work requests while stock issues from the stores can be automatically logged via the PDAs.

Kevin Shepherd, head of engineering and quality services says: "This isn't just about improving factory floor maintenance. Since the handhelds link straight into stock control, next we'll be looking at using them for auto-ordering from our spares suppliers."

Shepherd says best advantage comes from "being committed to the



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system" – using it wherever possible. "We use it for all planned and event-driven maintenance – handling work requests from production, generating work-to-do lists and so on – but also for contractor and engineering supplier management, spares stock control, materials purchasing, labour and spares expenditure calculations, budgetary management…. That's why we've been so successful: if you're half-hearted about this kind of system you won't see all the benefits."

Benefits

Keeping track of each planned and corrective maintenance task, FrontLine progressively - and effortlessly - builds a comprehensive service and breakdown history for each maintained item, helping the maintenance team identify and target the most problematic pieces of plant.

With the Stock Control, Purchasing and Financial modules integrally linked to the core Maintenance Management module, stock numbers can be added to work requests and stock issues logged via PDA, whilst re-ordering can be automated to maintain critical stock levels. The fully integrated Financial module collates day-to-day labour and spares expenditure and helps Walker manage budget forecasts, actual spend and the calculation of plant depreciation.

Shepherd explained: "We're also driving towards capturing as much information as possible, not only from engineers but plant operators. We've got user stations around the site for production team leaders. Collecting accurate information means we can start to analyse the plant and look for common faults. Then we can decide whether to put in a corrective repair - for example - or plan a modification to plant or modify planned maintenance to prevent problems."

Future plans

The next step is to roll out use of PDAs to other areas of the brewery and fully implement automated spares reordering from suppliers.

There's no doubt that all concerned will want to raise a glass of Banana Bread Beer, Bombardier Bitter or Waggle Dance to toast the next stage in Charles Wells' ongoing journey to world class operations. Cheers!

Insight

Moving to a 24/7 operation with unreliable equipment will cause maintenance costs to increase several fold, not just eating away, but sinking the envisioned gains eagerly anticipated by management. To achieve the gains, the maintenance team must work smarter and, as maintenance management is 10% engineering and 90% information management, maximising the use of the computerised maintenance management system is a prerequisite of success.

The Charles Wells' team realise the crucial contribution IT can make to maintenance management and this is one of the driving forces propelling the business forward. This is in stark contrast with the contribution of maintenance departments in so many other companies, where poor maintenance management practice continues to undermine manufacturing output and quality. ■

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