

Case Study



IMPORTANT STEP TOWARDS DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Progress-Werk Oberkirch achieves groupwide process transparency with iGrafX

The Story

Based in Oberkirch, Germany, automotive supplier PWO is a true global player with more than 3,400 employees worldwide. The company manufactures hightech metal parts and lightweight components for the automotive industry on three continents. Using iGrafX, PWO has standardized and made its document and process management transparent across the Group.

Progress-Werk Oberkirch AG (PWO) belongs to the small group of automotive suppliers worldwide. The customers of the company, which can look back on a track record spanning almost 100 years, value its excellence in the forming and joining of metals. The tradition-conscious, global Group is proud of its outstanding tool making precision, its extensive experience of welding processes and structural bonding, but also of the relaxed corporate culture characterized by respect, performance and sustainability. On this solid basis, PWO covers the entire value chain right up to series production. In the mid-nineteen nineties, the Group initiated a dynamic development that makes it a sought-after global player in its sector: After initial international collaborations in 1996, PWO started its business activities in Canada in 1997. PWO entered the Czech market in 2005, and just a year later, the company expanded its business base to China and Mexico. PWO meanwhile has nine production and assembly locations in Europe, North America and Asia.

The Challenge

It goes without saying that any expansion of global presence on this scale also requires reorganization of internal corporate structures. “The process and document management was far

from standardized”, explains Philipp Feger, Business Process Manager and Team Lead Organization. Each location had its own organizational structure and procedures. Neither the nature of their presentation nor the processes themselves were really comparable. In addition, the documents originally available at the home location in Oberkirch, such as organization, quality and management manuals, as well as the organizational and procedural instructions were only available in German. Group-wide deployment in multiple languages was not possible at this time.

Furthermore, there was no automated approval process. Paper documents were signed and scanned, process and quality manuals were prepared in MS Word, processes in Excel files. All of these documents were published in the company via the “Folio Views” software. These structures, which had grown over many years, were ill-adapted to keep a tight rein on a company spread across three continents and standardize its processes. This is, however, a fundamental requirement for surviving in tough global competition.

Group-wide control over processes and documents

Therefore, the business process managers in Oberkirch went in search of a tool to contain and structure the existing unchecked expansion. The aim was to be able to store and manage all processes and associated organization documents within the Group in a largely standardized form on a central platform. “In this way, we wanted to ensure group-wide control over all



existing and future processes and documents and, of course, to standardize and automate the associated update, review and release processes”, explains Philipp Feger. Above all, the new tool should support graphical process modeling and offer a large number of modeling options. Philipp Feger: “We wanted to have as much freedom as possible within the scope of established modeling conventions. However, the modeling conventions were to be defined by PWO itself.”

In addition, the future solution should support multilingual work, allow efficient searches and navigation, and provide a consistent validation and approval procedure. All documents should be stored in a central repository with web-based portal access. “All this with high usability – in terms of both modeling and use. After all, we did not want improved transparency and standardization if this made the system unreasonably complex to use.”

iGrafx met the requirements best

After an in-depth analysis of the market, PWO’s business process managers concluded that their requirements catalog was best covered by iGrafx. “The system offers a wide range of functions such as multilingualism, validation and approval procedures, central repository and more. In addition, iGrafx is largely free of modeling conventions. This gives us the desired freedom when representing our processes.” However, this does not only bring benefits, he notes. “On the one hand, we do not have to comply with any standard, so that the presentation can be tailored to our wishes and needs very well. On the other hand, we have found that these levels of freedom lead to different solutions through the different authors. The system itself does not check whether the representations are consistent, as we requested.

The result is a variety of presentation formats that makes it difficult to compare the varying representations. Therefore, an internal set of rules on how to present processes has been created. “In other words, we introduced some guidelines in the form of modeling standards.” Only working with free texts was slightly awkward explains Feger. “The system’s great strengths lie undoubtedly in the modeling of processes, which is why we implemented it in the first place. Different free text formatting

such as underlining, paragraphs or indentations are not entirely easy.”

Initial implementation in Oberkirch in 2009

The first version of iGrafx were introduced at the Group headquarters in Oberkirch. “It was a mammoth task, because we first had to examine all existing documents and check that they were up-to-date.” At the same time, the company evaluated its own standards: “We did not want old wine in new bottles.” The implementation of iGrafx itself was quite straightforward and fast, notes Philipp Feger. “We integrated the iGrafx search function into our internal SharePoint environment. Access to the repository database takes place via our intranet applications.”

In the next step, Feger and his colleagues rolled out the tool in the subsidiaries in Canada, the Czech Republic, Mexico and China. “That too was technically relatively easy. All of our IT runs in the private cloud, meaning iGrafx was technically immediately available to our subsidiaries.” Here, too, the main task was to inspect and check existing documents and then compare and align them with the in-house standard. “The real challenge was to standardize all processes across the Group in terms of form and content.” The main business processes were available for each division right from the start. With the help of iGrafx, they were specified together with the division in the form of further processes. “And, of course, we have also implemented the requirements of the automotive industry, as defined by the International Automotive Task Force IATF, into the process world.”

Group-wide in all departments

PWO meanwhile uses iGrafx both in administrative and operational areas in all Group companies and all departments. The processes are created and maintained by the business process managers. Each PWO location has at least one business process manager who oversees the local process world. A weekly telephone conference is held to ensure that the organization and presentation remain consistent throughout the Group. “At least one business process manager from each



location participates. We discuss each new process and its presentation. The respective process representation is only published in iGrafx if we agree that it fits.”


As a result, Philipp Feger and his colleagues have observed a growing process awareness and improved transparency and uniformity. “The bigger the Group becomes, the stronger the interest of employees in consistent and reliable standards. And that’s exactly what we deliver with iGrafx. This is one of the reasons the tool enjoys a very high acceptance among the users.”

The Benefits

On this basis, PWO has meanwhile optimized many processes and made them transparent. In addition, all processes are visible to every employee. “Everyone has the chance to draw attention to optimization potential in processes. This creates a certain constructive restlessness, which is definitely desirable. And with the PWO process world, we have successfully passed all certifications, including the most recent ones according to IATF.”

And last but not least: Because iGrafx is very stable and reduces search times to a minimum thanks to the integrated search and filter functions, PWO can now centrally manage all processes and documents that are relevant for the Group. “As a result, we have achieved a high degree of standardization.” The constant process optimization results in increasingly transparent and better structures – “and the processes are easier to maintain.” The repository is meanwhile a central knowledge base for users within the PWO Group. It serves as the basis for employee training and education, the groupwide storage of know-how, for audits and certifications and as a central communication platform.

In short: With the introduction of iGrafx, the Group has taken an important step towards digital transformation. “Without the functions provided by iGrafx, managing processes and documents in an international company like PWO would only be possible at exorbitant expense”, says the Business Process Manager. “The functions have proven themselves; we definitely wouldn’t want to be without them anymore.” Progress-Werk Oberkirch AG has already scheduled their group-wide update to the newest iGrafx version. “We are looking forward to the new ‘look and feel’, to the extension and simplification of the rights management via web interface, to even more efficiency and new functions.”



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iGrafx

iGrafx, LLC
7585 SW Mohawk St.
Tualatin, OR 97062
United States

Tel: 503.404.6050
info@iGrafx.com
www.iGrafx.com

iGrafx EMEA

iGrafx GmbH
Dr.-Johann-Heitzer-Str. 2
85757 Karlsfeld-Munich
Germany

Tel: +49 (0)8131 3175 0
info.de@iGrafx.com
www.iGrafx.com/de

Contact

For other contact details visit
www.iGrafx.com/contact