



CASE STUDY:

Alpha Measurement Solutions

ALERE ERP Unites Disconnected Manufacturing and Financial Systems Across the Alpha Subsidiaries

WAC Solution Partners – Los Angeles Deliver Expert
Implementation and Comprehensive Training Program to
Ensure Best Practices and Generate Optimal Results



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Profile

Name: AlpHa Measurement Solutions

Location: Houston, Texas **Industry:** Water Testing

Products & Services: Liquid Sensor Measurement Devices **Website:** www.alpha-measure.com

System: ALERE® ERP **Add-ons:** EDI Integration, Ship Assist – FedEx & UPS Integration, Credit Card Processing – Authorize.Net, ACH Bank Document Generation

Implementation Partner: WAC Solution Partners – Los Angeles; Expertise with Local Roots and National Reach

Founded in December, 2019, Houston Texas-based AlpHa Measurement Solutions is a liquid sensor technology platform serving the complex testing needs of water quality, pharmaceutical, laboratory and industrial markets. Strategically aligned to the establishment of AlpHa was its acquisition of the Van London Co., following prior acquisitions of Analytical Sensors & Instruments (ASI) and its Chinese subsidiary Aurora Scientific Instruments (Aurora). Together, all three of these entities function as sister companies under the AlpHa banner.

Founded in 1989, ASI develops and manufactures electrochemical and optical water quality sensors, chemical solutions and accessories. ASI delivers its comprehensive portfolio of measurement parameters in customizable, turnkey solutions to OEM customers worldwide.

Founded in 1961, Van London is a U.S. manufacturer of high-quality, mission-critical electrodes. Van London provides its branded and private-label sensor solutions to water treatment, pharmaceutical, laboratory and other diverse industrial markets.

Founded in 1995, Aurora manufactures electrochemical sensors, components and accessories used in a variety of water-testing applications. From its headquarters in Shanghai, China, Aurora delivers global supply chain with high-volume electrode and component manufacturing, flexible sourcing solutions and direct customer service to APAC and international customers.

Challenge

Tower of Babel – Sister Companies' Business Systems Don't Speak the Same Language. Inventory Management in Disarray.

AlpHa Measurement Solutions was established with a goal of “organically and inorganically establishing the market’s leading liquid sensor technology platform.” The acquisitions of the three entities (described above), whose offerings were largely complementary, constituted a

core part of their strategy. However, while the new sister companies were expected to significantly boost AlpHa’s long-term results, an inconvenient reality emerged – all of them were using different business management systems that didn’t speak to one another.

Two of the entities, Van London and ASI, were manufacturing similar products, but their inventory and accounting systems were incompatible. The third, Aurora Scientific Instruments, based in Shanghai, was using a manufacturing software solution written in Mandarin and tailored to Chinese methodologies.

The lack of integration and use of inefficient and error-prone manual systems plagued AlpHa and its affiliated subsidiaries. Here were a few of the most consequential issues they faced:

- » **Inaccurate/Duplicate and Manually Managed Data** – This wreaked havoc with mission-critical inventory tracking, customer/supplier records, financial reporting, purchasing and manufacturing.
- » **Inventory Issues on Many Fronts** – Problems with inventory tracking were particularly disruptive, especially with regard to manufacturing processes and financial reporting. These chronic issues frequently led to inventory shortages and delayed shipments, while also damaging customer satisfaction.
- » **AP/PO and GL Out of Sync** – Payables and purchase orders were not synced between the disparate systems. The general ledger structure in Van London’s legacy accounting software was different than that in AlpHa’s, making it a challenge to map old GL transactions to ALERE.
- » **Disconnected Data Silos Among Entities** – A myriad of disconnected systems compromised their ability to effectively manage their supply chain, purchasing, inventory levels and production scheduling decisions.
- » **Lack of Standardized Processes** – Individuals often tackled various tasks in their own ways, leaving others unable to duplicate those procedures. This had adverse effects on inventory management, especially when calculating on-hand inventory and its valuation. Sales, reporting and accounting were also compromised by these inconsistencies.

According to Anthony Bihl, AlpHa’s project manager and trainer, “The challenge of trying to resolve all the issues that we faced as a result of disconnected business systems was monumental. Our inventory management and financial processes were in a compromised state and an intervention was sorely needed. Specifically, we had to find the right ERP solution and the right implementation partner to guide us through those deep, murky waters. Fortunately for us, help was on the way.”



Resistance to change created another hurdle when it was time to upgrade to a more robust business management system and migrate data. Many were so accustomed to the old ways that the prospect of having to unlearn ingrained habits and then get up to speed with “best practices” on a new system was daunting. This made the goal of unifying all their collective data, reporting and inventory management into one system even more challenging. The added reality of a pandemic, site consolidation and significant supply chain issues further exacerbated the problem.

Solution

WAC Solution Partners – LA Devises Winning Strategy to Unify All Business Systems and Overcome Reluctance to Change

Upon completion of Alpha’s acquisition process, the company had one overarching goal – bring all of its North American entities’ disconnected systems into one cohesive system so that management could reap the benefits of complete visibility into their business processes.

Prior to the acquisition, Van London had integrated their legacy accounting system data with TIW’s (www.tiwc.com) **ALERE Manufacturing Suite** for their bills of materials (BOM’s) and work orders. Unlike many competitors in the small-to mid-sized business ERP market, the ALERE Manufacturing Suite is a core component of **ALERE Business Applications** (a complete ERP solution), not a third-party, add-on product. The full-blown ERP system includes Accounting, CRM, Manufacturing, Service, Mobility, Analytics, Document Management and Data Acquisition modules. The ALERE Manufacturing Suite, highlighted in this case study, offers a host of modules that address specific parts of the manufacturing process – Order, Route, BOM (Modular-Variable- Alternate), Schedule, Plan and Cost.

ALERE Manufacturing Suite – Key Winning Differentiators for Alpha

ALERE possesses a number of capabilities that surpass those in most manufacturing suites in this market segment. Here are a few that were key components of the Alpha implementation:

- » Warehouse Management System (WMS) with built-in scanning (bar-coding) is utilized throughout the inventory control, receiving, production and shipping processes.
- » Document Management is designed to support key organizational processes such as certifications, traceability and supply chain management.
- » Incomparable customizability enables seamless portability to new product releases, making it fully adaptable to the unique requirements of any manufacturer.

- » Acquisition and ongoing costs are significantly lower than in comparable manufacturing solutions targeted to the SMB market.

WAC Solution Partners Execute Strong, Hands-on Implementation Plan

Alpha management called Los Angeles area-based WAC Solution Partners, to help them resolve the plethora of issues they had been facing. The WAC team commenced the implementation with a one-week, onsite visit to assess the overall challenges. First, they had to gain a complete understanding of the different business systems in place across the enterprise, with special focus on the disconnected manufacturing/financial software and processes currently employed and how to integrate them into one cohesive system. After this initial period of discovery, they generated a blueprint, including screenshots, to demonstrate how the ALERE ERP software could be most effectively utilized to manage all their existing processes once they had migrated and converted all their data from their entities’ legacy systems.

The WAC team, in effect, created a bridge between the old, disconnected software and the new ALERE ERP solution. During the transition phase, training was virtually non-stop, up to four times per week. The WAC team spent time in every department and coached management and staff on how to use best practices so they could optimize the unique benefits of the ALERE software. The primary objectives were to ensure that all financial and manufacturing systems were in sync and that all users were comfortable and could get up to speed in minimal time.

During the data conversion process of roughly six months, WAC training staff directed a “training wheels” period that proved highly successful. First, they created a test version of the ALERE system on their own servers where Alpha personnel could log in and practice without concern for making any critical mistakes that could cause the live system to crash. As many as 30 users, including the controller, took advantage of this opportunity to hone their skills. In fact, feedback from Alpha users during this period led to a few enhancements and minor modifications to the system.

According to Ben Hanan, Business Systems Analyst at WAC Solution Partners, “Our team worked very closely with our counterparts at Alpha to engender complete trust. We followed a well-defined process, honed through decades of experience, that contributed to a successful implementation, beginning with a needs analysis, followed by a blueprint that outlines every step in the implementation process, including structured project management (starting with a kick-off meeting and continuing with weekly project progress reports), system test environment, training, continuous communication with upper management and finally, team acceptance.”



Results

ALERE ERP Brings All Entities into Harmony Without Any Business Interruptions.

It's truly amazing what transpired at AlpHa, once previously disconnected systems were finally connected across the enterprise. The Tower of Babel was relegated to the past – the language barrier disappeared and everyone was on the same page. With the ALERE ERP system in place, management enjoyed greater visibility into accurate and up-to-date information, tasks were now replicable, errors were minimized and efficiency dramatically improved enterprise-wide. Plus, armed with access to real-time business intelligence, decision-making became more confident and on-target.

Horror stories of significant business interruptions lasting several weeks to months during implementation are well known. However, AlpHa experienced zero business interruption during the entire data conversion and training period, while improvements in efficiency and accuracy surged.

The ALERE ERP solution delivered a number of revenue-enhancing and cost-saving benefits that pushed AlpHa into the win column:

- » ALERE provided nearly everything a manufacturing enterprise such as AlpHa needed right out of the box; very little customization was required to adapt to their unique requirements.
- » The Sales department enjoyed ease of access to all critical customer and inventory information, resulting

in increased sales value per transaction. Their ability to respond instantly to customer queries with accurate, up-to-the-minute information elevated customer satisfaction and retention.

- » The ALERE Manufacturing Suite significantly increased BOM accuracy, which helped lower inventory costs and saved valuable engineering time. Material Requirements Planning (MRP) was achieved with a single pass that includes all levels in a bill down to purchased components, further reducing the inventory costs of carrying unnecessary items.
- » Staff resources were freed up due to the increases in efficiency, leading to redeployment of personnel to more-needed functions.
- » Purchasing had access to accurate inventory levels and costs to negotiate better pricing with suppliers.

Anthony Bihl raved about the dual benefits of ease of use of the software and the effectiveness of WAC's intensive training to help management and staff overcome their resistance to change. "Overall, our personnel just loved how easy the ALERE ERP solution was to learn, especially when compared to other WMS products they had used at other companies. It was amazing how much people learned in just one hour of training. Given how much fear many had with the idea of learning a new system, the combination of ALERE's flexibility and WAC's hands-on training led to a transformation that was something to behold. In fact, many on our staff have gone from novices to experts in less than a year."

Steve Krebs, COO at AlpHa Measurement Solutions and project executive sponsor, was duly impressed with all the enterprise-wide improvements that they've seen with the ALERE ERP system and with the level of service and expertise delivered by the WAC Solution Partners team:



ALERE was able to effectively consolidate four legacy systems into one modern ERP platform. The new platform has provided valuable, real-time business intelligence and facilitated additional efficient process changes, from order entry to shipping. We would like to thank the entire WAC Solution Partners team for their guidance and support, from discovery through implementation.

