LEADING THE PACK
ACRO

At Acro Associates, every component has to be a perfect ten.

Its systems and components must meet and often exceed the quality requirements of clients like Abbott Labs, Fresenius Medical Care and NxStage. Quality is its lifeblood. Yet so is innovation. Acro (Concord, CA) produces components for the bio processing and medical device markets. Since 2007, a steady stream of breakthroughs has led to increased revenues of 50% and a doubling of its workforce to 60 employees.

Spending large amounts of time and energy on rigid quality requirements can get in the way of innovation. That's why in 2008, Acro President Russell Ziegler and his management team saw the dilemma in establishing a TQM within a culture emphasizing R & D. "Managing a total quality management system, if you do it right, is a complex undertaking," says Ziegler. "You can have lots of people organizing reams of documentation and forms. Our head of quality was controlling everything with spreadsheets and logs. We were sinking into a bog of details."

That year Acro attended the Syspro trade show in Florida. Syspro is Acro's ERP system. It serves industries that need a high level of control like the medical device industry. UniPoint Software (Winnipeg and Minneapolis) had created a custom interface to automate quality and compliance management for Syspro users in a scalable way. Its 16 integrated modules transformed a TQM system into a collaborative environment for continuous improvement.

"Without uniPoint we would not be as successful as we are today. It allowed us to take our quality system to a level not achievable before."

Russell Ziegler, President
Acro Associates, Concord, CA

www.acroassociates.com

"We saw the value-add immediately," says Ziegler. "UniPoint accomplished and automated everything our quality director was doing manually. We purchased the system. Now, 3 years in, it saves us $60K plus a year in costs associated with managing the system manually or using our previous non-integrated system."

The key, Ziegler says, is uniPoint integration with Syspro. In the case of a nonconformity, product issue or return, Acro can pull the information related to that piece, product, component or material right from Syspro.

"UniPoint enables us to spend 40% less time on managing quality and increase the time we spend on improving quality. The system also saves us one headcount and for a small company that's critical."

For their quality director, uniPoint provides an automated work flow that no longer requires multiple emails, coordination and spreadsheets. JoAnn Wood considers the system complex but user friendly with excellent support. In November, 2010, Acro's comprehensive 3-year ISO audit went so well, auditors suggested moving to a yearly surveillance audit rather than every six months. Meanwhile, new components keep rolling off the drawing boards.

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Acro Associates produces components and fluid control systems for the bio processing and medical device markets. Its Intelivalve ™ Solenoid Pinch Valve and Acrosense ™ Fluid Control Platform are patent-pending products for use in applications like dialysis machines, blood collectors and cell separators. The company was ISO 9001:2000 certified in 2008.

THE ISSUE

The pioneering culture at Acro was in jeopardy. After ISO certification in 2008, their quality team became mired in detail and documentation. Management knew having TQM is all about continuous improvement. Their "value add" charter was in danger.

THE SOLUTION

In 2008, Acro automated their quality system. UniPoint for Syspro enabled them to continue their growth curve in industries demanding innovation and complex quality management. UniPoint integrates with their Syspro ERP, providing efficiency and sustaining their competitive advantage: innovative fluid control systems.

THE RESULTS

- 40% less time managing quality
- Annual savings of $60K+
- A move to annual rather than six-month surveillance audits
- Organizational and operational efficiencies

THE FUTURE

- In addition to its 7 current uniPoint modules, Acro will add Education and Training, and Document Viewer.
- For convenience on the shop floor, Acro will work on using the uniPoint Document Viewer to display content on the iPad using a web browser.