by Jimmy Myers, senior editor

INTEGRAL SOLUTIONS

ERP software that integrates with disparate software offers sheet metal fabricators an avenue to improved efficiencies

It is difficult to imagine a time when digitization wasn't an integral part of any company's day-to-day operations. Even those most nostalgic for manual processes have come to embrace technology, especially enterprise resource planning (ERP) software that can bring a massive boost in productivity.

Making the step to implement an ERP solution is admittedly a big one, but companies take this leap in an effort to achieve everything from better inventory management to enhanced visibility for the multiple processes involved in a production facility.

Metal fabricators utilizing lasers in their shops seek out solutions that help them gain insights – and not just from the laser and how it is processing materials – but companywide, from ordering inventory to gaining insights from machinery throughout the shop. This is what high-functioning ERP software and other software can offer.

Lantek LLC developed Integra, which is ERP software that has the ability to integrate with other software systems, providing manufacturers with valuable insights that improve production – and without having to jettison legacy software. Rather, Lantek built Integra to compliment other systems, especially those that focus on laser cutting sheet metal. Everything from production orders to billing, warehouse consumption to tracking, manufacturing status and everything in between is studied and applied by Integra.

Answering customer needs

A laser cutting machine is a massive investment, and while utilizing such technology can result in a productivity edge and efficiencies that save money, a fabricator's business doesn't revolve around the cutting solution alone. Anupam Chakraborty, commercial director at Lantek, says his company provides customers with a "complete range of solution products" that are not restricted to cutting operations.

"Integra also integrates with downstream processes," he says. "Our Lantek MES (manufacturing execution system) can provide 360-degree →

"[The ERP software] is not built to compete with other ERP systems. Rather, the idea is to provide customers a solution that fits their requirements."

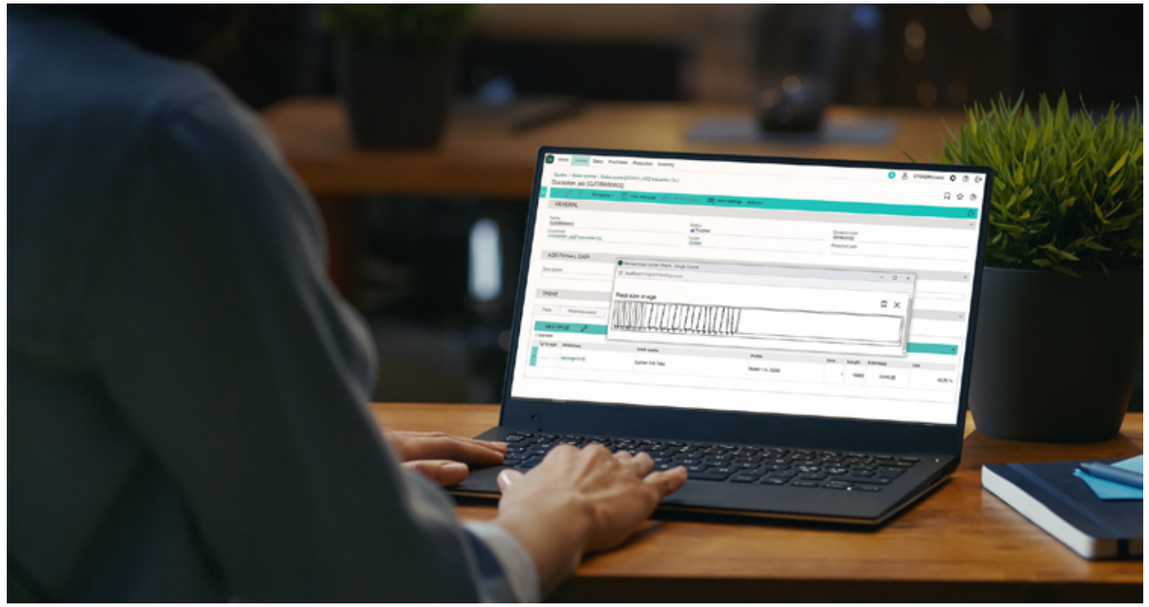
Anupam Chakraborty, commercial director, Lantek LLC

integration with our ERP system, as well as other ERP systems."

Laura Santamaria, project manager at Lantek, says since Integra's initial development, the vision has been to cover customer necessities in the sheet metal transformation sector, which are historically difficult to obtain with a standard ERP system. And these necessities include integrating with different software and assisting in communicating with other machines.

"It is very important to know that we can offer an ERP system to our customers that is well-integrated," she says, "not only with the rest of Lantek products, but also with the customer's current ecosystem."

What differentiates Lantek from other ERP software suppliers? Chakraborty says his company's ERP software has been developed "in-house" for "tightly integrating with the whole system, thereby offering →



Integrating with legacy solutions can be a roadblock to success, but not with Lantek's Integra ERP software, which is built to work with other ERP systems.

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a robust and stable environment for the customer."

Niche solutions

Integra is designed specifically for sheet metal fabrication, but Chakraborty says the software is also developed with tools that can adapt to the necessities of the customer and their applications.

"In my humble opinion," he says, "Lantek's success lies in the skilled manpower that is knowledgeable and empathetic. This brings Lantek very close to our customers, giving them pain-free solutions for their machines and integration requirements in their working environment."

Santamaria says in her experience, customers seek out an expert that can speak a similar technical vocabulary and provide a solution to a unique situation without an extensive "get to know you" period.

"It directly leads our customers to search for a niche solution oriented to them and developed by sector experts without losing focus on their continued market needs," she says. "And for sure, if Lantek covers a high percentage of their requirements, they choose us against the standard ERP systems."

An important note here is that Lantek's ERP system, Chakraborty says, is not built to compete with other ERP systems. Rather, the idea is to provide customers a solution that fits their requirements.

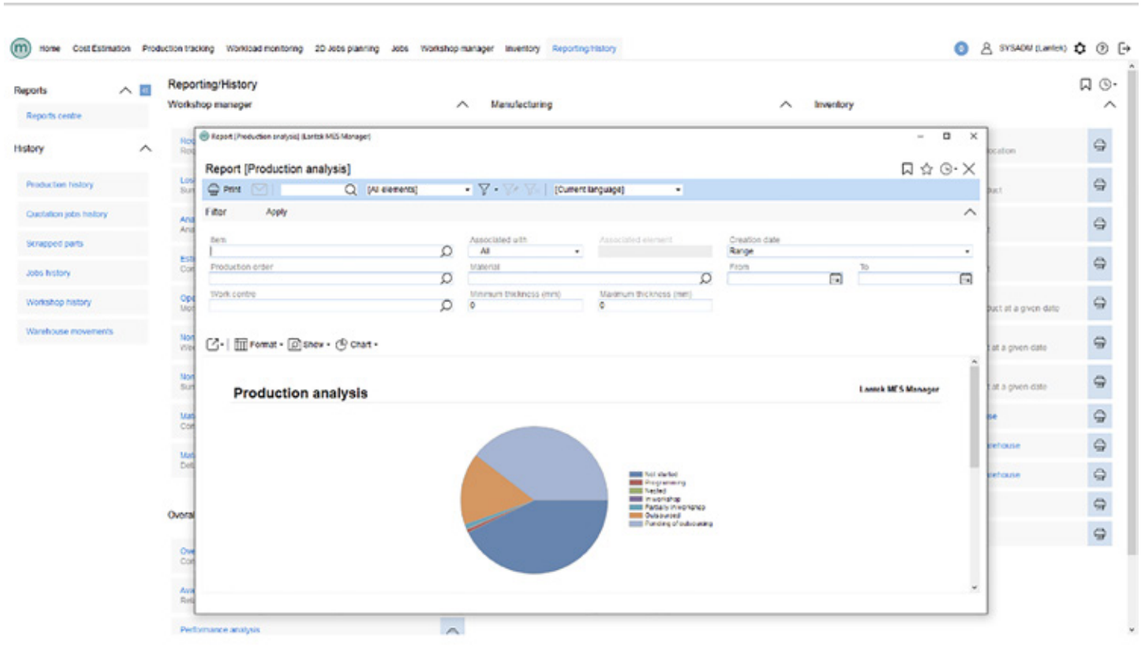
"If a customer has an ERP solution they are happy with," he says, "we will integrate with it. If a customer does not have an ERP system and would like to implement one, then we recommend ours."

"Talking" to machines

In a Lantek case study, a U.K.-based metal fabrication company based called C. Brown had "islands of software" that was dedicated to various production processes on individual machines, including laser cutters, which "seriously affected" the company's flexibility; when production moved from one machine to another, reprogramming was a necessity. Company leaders realized they needed a management system that could program all the machines.

C. Brown utilized Integra's outsourcing module, which manages subcontracted tasks. With the ability to build subcontracted processes, such as countersinking holes in materials, into their quotations, the company's sales team consistently reported high levels of on-time delivery, thus improving customer satisfaction levels.

Integra also assisted C. Brown in identifying common problems and "key areas of weakness" in its manufacturing and service, offering insights that informed proactive action that prevented further production issues. →



Manufacturers with a 360-degree view of operations make fact-based decisions that help them reach their goals. Lantek's software focuses on maximum visibility, particularly for manufacturers working with sheet metal.

“We wanted a joined-up solution that was within budget,” said a C. Brown marketing director. “Lantek’s Integra was the only one we could find which suited our requirements.”

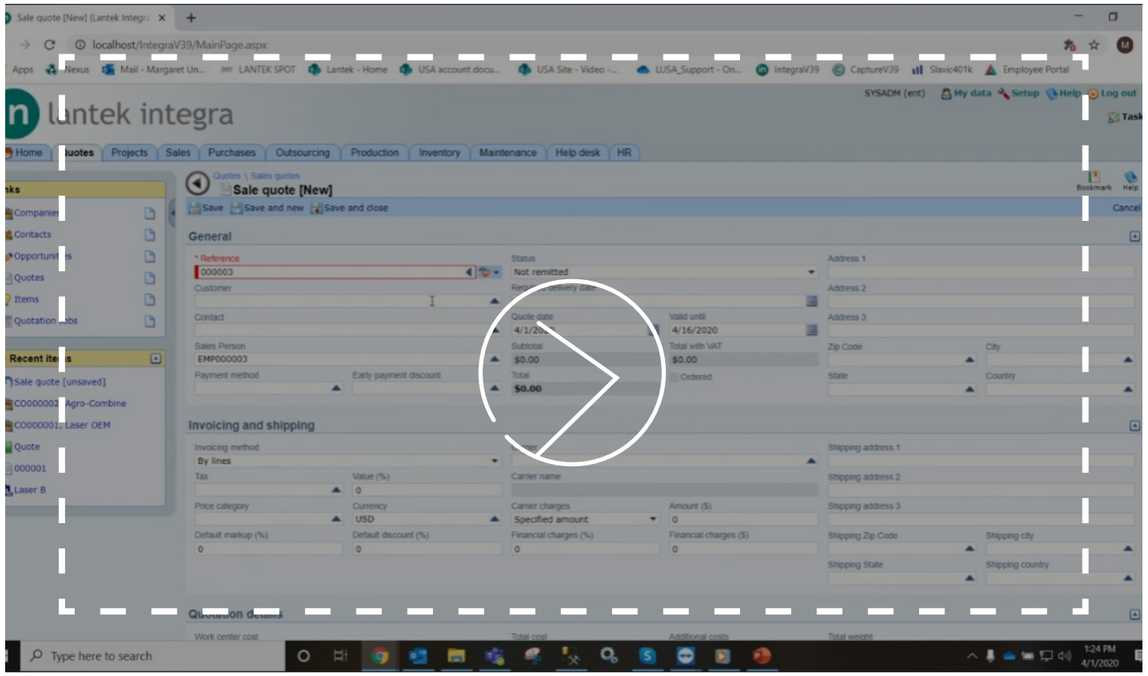
Santamaria says customers might require CAD/CAM software and analytics products on top of Integra but mentions that they are all “well-integrated with each other,” whereas competing ERP software can “cover only part of the customer’s requirements.”

“And we cannot forget that Lantek is able to ‘talk’ to the customer machines,” she says, “sending information so the machines know what to produce. All of this is very difficult for standard ERP systems, being in many cases even impossible.”→

Watch the video to see what’s new in Lantek’s Integra 2022 version.

“We prioritize being as close to our customers and their machines as possible. We can now communicate with more than 1,200 different machine models around the world.”

Laura Santamaria, project manager, Lantek LLC



Need to create a sales quote? Watch the video to see how it's done in Lantek's Integra software for sheet metal processing.

And rather than have customers suffer through the "islands of software" problem, centralizing and unifying data is something Santamaria says is a process that began at Lantek more than 35 years ago and has been in continuous evolution since. Utilizing different modules from Lantek, the company's solutions can manage a customer's entire production process, whereas ERP software from competitors only cover part of the customer's requirements.

"We prioritize being as close to our customers and their machines as possible," she says. "We can now communicate with more than 1,200 different machine models around the world."

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