



BUS MANUFACTURER TRANSFORMS PRODUCTION FACILITIES

THOMAS BUILT BUSES

/// CASE STUDY



Thomas Built Buses wanted to modernize its production facilities. EDS, an HP company, implemented innovative solutions like Web-based supply chain management and a wireless production environment to help Thomas Built improve the production capacity, cost and efficiency of its factories.

CLIENT PROFILE

www.thomasbus.com

As one of North America's longest-standing automotive manufacturers, Thomas Built Buses has been producing high-quality vehicles since 1916. Now, thanks to its commitment to design and innovation, more than one-third of all school buses in America are Thomas Built Buses.

Industry: Manufacturing

Headquarters:

High Point, North Carolina

Production Capacity:

15,000 Buses per Year

Business Needs Addressed:

Innovation
Productivity

Bus manufacturer wanted to modernize its production facilities

Thomas Built Buses has become one of America's primary manufacturers of buses through constant innovation and a commitment to high design standards. With these qualities in mind, the company set out to create a new manufacturing facility for its latest C2 product line, as well as completely refresh the 110-year-old facility that was currently producing its popular D-type buses.

EDS had been working with Thomas Built as a manufacturing and IT consultant since 1993 and had helped the company streamline its traditional paper-based systems. So Thomas Built looked to expand its relationship with EDS as it began the task of transforming its original factory and creating a new factory from the ground up.

EDS' innovation linked factories with suppliers and dealers

EDS recommended a phased implementation of IT infrastructure and applications to minimize interruptions during the transformation project.

Thomas Built had been using 48 dedicated, high-speed telecommunication lines to work with dealers and customers. While effective, this solution proved to be extremely expensive. To reduce the cost, EDS implemented Web-based applications that can be used from any location – without the need for expensive dedicated infrastructure.

EDS also improved the company's storage area network (SAN) with distributed Windows Servers at branch office locations. In addition to providing increased data storage and processing speed, the new SAN is fully mirrored to ensure data availability even in the event that the primary storage system fails.

For the company's new C2 plant, EDS implemented cutting-edge supply chain management technology. A Web-based environment allows Thomas Built to work directly with hundreds of suppliers, greatly improving supply chain efficiency.

Services featured

- Applications Development Services
- Mobile Applications Services
- Workplace Server Management Services

EDS also partnered with Oracle to replace the company's paper-based supply chain management and shop broadcast systems with a completely electronic system that improves the reliability of dock management as well as material handling, storage and usage. This system ensures the production floor is clear of unused materials, greatly reducing the amount of wasted or lost stock.

Thomas Built worked with EDS to improve production capacities through lean manufacturing principles and a just-in-time delivery sequence. This allows workers on the factory floor to have the parts they need when they need them, greatly reducing the complexity of assembly. EDS also implemented a Cisco network, complete with Voice over IP (VoIP) and mobile applications such as material tracking and shortage reporting via scanners on the production floor. This streamlines production and increases the number of buses that meet quality standards on the first pass.

The new C2 facility has become a model for Thomas Built's existing production operations. The company is currently working to overhaul its old factory to mirror the new one's industry-best standards and operating efficiency.

Thomas Built improved production efficiency, capacity and costs

Thomas Built's reputation for innovation is well deserved. By embracing modern technology, the company has greatly reduced manufacturing costs and improved production capacity.

Before the transformation efforts, Thomas Built ordered up to 10 percent safety stock to mitigate the problem of missing and lost materials. Now, thanks to improved material management, shop floors are free of unused materials, and the company no longer orders safety stock. Inventory turns have also improved by more than 50 percent, reducing holding costs.

Additional efficiency improvements come from the just-in-time production methods, which have increased on-time bus delivery by 19.7 percent. Streamlined supply chain workflows enable the new C2 factory to produce up to 44 buses in a single day, vastly improving the older facility's capacity of eight to 12 D-type buses.

Production quality has also improved as a result of the company's factory transformation. The wireless technology deployed in the plant enables a continuous quality feedback loop which has led to a nearly 22 percent improvement in quality ratings.

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