



Universal Lift Parts

Company Facts

- Location: Flint, Michigan
- Industry: Automotive
- Number of Locations: 3
- Number of Employees: Approximately 40

Automation: The latest chapter of adaptation and growth

Anyone seeking an example of the power of adaptation need look no further than Universal Lift Parts, a lift-truck parts supplier to General Motors that has transformed itself into a thriving auto parts distributorship serving some 300 vehicle repair shops throughout southeastern Michigan.

Universal Lift was founded in 1972 by Ken and Janice Ayres. Ken had been working for a large lift-truck dealer that serviced GM and saw that the automaker was interested in aftermarket components. He and Janice took the plunge in filling that need with their fledgling distributorship. The couple also stocked a broad inventory of replacement engine parts, a decision that helped them eventually build a strong base of automotive customers.

Growth has continued throughout the years under Ken and Janice, their children, Connie, Michael and Brian Ayres, their granddaughter Michelle and great grandson Christian, who have all contributed to expanding the company's footprint with a large warehouse in Oakland County and a smaller facility in Port Huron. "Business has been good, and I really think it all comes down to our customer service," says Connie, co-owner and vice president of sales. "We bend over backwards for the customer and have very knowledgeable people on our order desk."

Mastering the complex

With service excellence comes increased business complexity. This is especially true in an industry with high SKU counts and customers who depend on hotshot delivery. In short, Universal's great people needed a great business operating system.

The company's reliable Epicor® Prism™ system had been the right solution for nearly 20 years, but Connie and Brian needed to automate a much broader range of processes to help continue their growth. Their search led to the powerful Epicor Eagle® solution.

Blowing through bottlenecks

As Universal Lift grew, a variety of operational bottlenecks appeared, particularly in three vital business areas: purchasing, pricing, and inventory management.

"We're faster and more efficient today. With our Eagle system, we have more control over our operation and better information on how every area of our business is performing."

Connie Ayres, Vice President | Universal Lift Parts

Success Highlights

The Epicor Prism system served Universal Lift Parts well for nearly 20 years, but the owners wanted to automate more processes to support their growth. They converted to the Epicor Eagle for the Aftermarket system after evaluating their needs. Since implementing the system, they have more flexibility in managing order transmissions, price updating and receiving.

“Our Eagle system is definitely paying for itself in terms of increased productivity, speed, and accuracy.”

Brian Ayres, Vice President

The Ayres insight to customer purchases was limited to “canned” reports available through their Prism system. But even more limiting were the processes required to transmit orders to ACDelco, manage pricing updates, and control the movement of parts among the company’s locations.

The old system required that Brian provide manually edited order information to ACDelco via floppy disk. “I had to spend a lot of time reviewing the files, then saving it to a disk,” he says. “Then, sometimes the disk wouldn’t work, so we were wasting a lot of valuable time. With our Eagle system, we transmit all orders directly to ACDelco.”

Updating prices was equally challenging. The old system couldn’t import pricing files from ACDelco, forcing Brian to rely on an outside source. With Eagle, he now easily imports comprehensive updates at the beginning of each month.

Receiving was another labor-intensive bottleneck, with an employee spending up to three days physically checking in stock. “Each part got a piece of tape that indicated the bin location,” Brian explains. “Now, we’re using the Eagle system’s bar code gun to receive product and automatically generate bin labels. We’ve saved the equivalent of a person and a half in simply receiving a stock order.”

Meeting the 10:30 a.m. deadline

Among the toughest challenges was meeting each morning’s 10:30 stock transfer deadline. The team was forced to establish this cutoff due to the time needed to process transfers using the old system. In addition, an extra staff member was required to check for errors before shipments left the warehouse.

“We were forced to do it so early in the day simply because of the complexity (of the job),” Brian says. “With Eagle we’re still doing it only once a day but it’s at least an hour faster, much easier and we’re a lot more accurate.”

Accuracy, control, and confidence

Ask Connie and Brian to quantify the advantages of their Eagle system—beyond the significant ROI benefits—and they’ll eventually focus on the concept of breathing room. By automating processes, they each have more time to examine how their business is performing.

For Connie, a little extra breathing room has enabled her to dive into the powerful capabilities of the Eagle system’s integrated Epicor Compass™ business analytics. “Compass has been very helpful in running sales and customer reports and managing promotions,” she says. “I feel like I have a better handle on how the business is operating and where we have opportunities to improve.”

Increased productivity. Exceptional accuracy. The same outstanding customer service. Has the Epicor Eagle solution played a role in the continued success of the Ayres’s business?

“Absolutely,” says Brian. “In fact, we have another distributor coming in here today to look at our system. I wouldn’t do that unless I was happy with the way Eagle was working for us.”

About Epicor

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