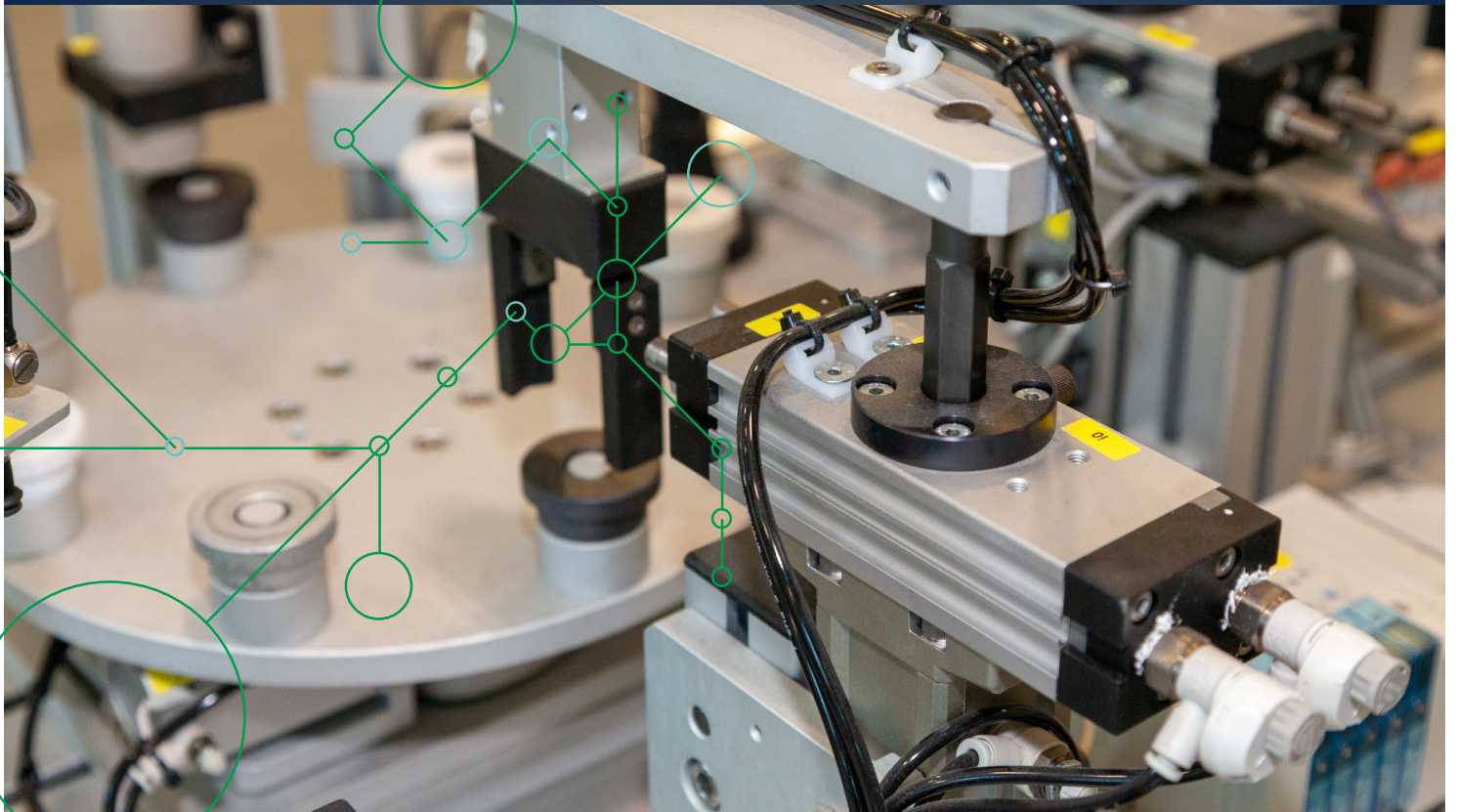


ANALYTICS

SMC puts data at its fingertips

Manufacturing automation giant takes data analysis to new levels





CUSTOMER STORY

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Donny Nguyen, Vice-President, SMC Corporation of America

A manufacturing success story

Production line robotics and automation has been one of manufacturing’s most high-profile success stories of recent decades. And while many associate the technology with automotive and semiconductor production, its use has spread to multiple sectors and industries, from food to packaging, medical equipment and beyond.

Based in Noblesville, Indiana, SMC Corporation of America is the North American headquarters of Japan-based SMC Corporation, a global specialist in pneumatic control engineering for industrial automation applications. Put simply, it manufactures and supplies component parts to build manufacturing robots.

“The applications for the pneumatic and automation products we provide are endless,” says Donny Nguyen, Vice-President at SMC Corporation of America. “We discover new applications and develop new products every single day.”

While plenty of companies work in the space that SMC occupies, few have the breadth and depth of its market coverage, and the strength and experience of its sales team. Unsurprisingly, demand for SMC products is strong and growing as a short labor market pushes companies worldwide to use automation in order to maintain high-quality output at sustainable rates.

“We have an estimated market share of 32% in North America and 38% worldwide,” notes Nguyen. “But we want to keep growing, delivering products and support no matter what.”

Solution Overview

Customer Name

SMC Corporation

Industry

Manufacturing

Geography

USA

Function

IT, Sales, Supply Chain Management

Business Value Driver

New Business Opportunities, Reimagined Processes

Challenges

- Disparate data sources were leading to disconnected reporting
- Aged and inconsistent data hampered decision-making processes
- Analytics staff had to switch between multiple platforms

Solution

SMC deployed Qlik across its organization, using the Qlik Analytics Platform to integrate with its in-house CRM platform to provide a single source of truth.

Results

- Qlik pulls in data from multiple sources and formats
- Cost-effective solution enables real-time analysis
- SMC can now quickly identify sales trends and other critical metrics

Staying ahead of the market

A number of factors have driven SMC to its market-leading position. Manufacturers that use the automation route tend, according to Nguyen, to be more conscious of costs than most, and that extends to its suppliers. Critical to SMC's success, therefore, is strong sales analysis. By building a strong data-driven knowledge of what products are selling and where, and keeping ahead of vital market trends, SMC aims to operate an agile and responsive business that gives clients the best products and services at competitive prices.

Tasked with delivering this information was a team of analytics professionals who, while effective, were hampered by a disjointed system and time-consuming processes. Individual departments had their own analyst teams working with their own sets of data; there was little co-ordination with other functions, and data was often aged and unreliable.

"People had to pull data manually from our old system, transfer it into other software and then delegate someone to present it," recalls Nguyen. "Everybody ran different reports on different versions of data. It wasn't efficient, and it was creating problems."

For Nguyen the opportunity was clear: SMC was accumulating valuable raw data, but it was scattered between different systems. What he needed was a way to centralize access to information and present it quickly and accurately to those who needed it.

Flexibility and efficiency

A one-month pilot of Qlik quickly offered a clear way ahead, providing SMC with a cost-effective tool to aggregate data from across sales and supply lines to deliver what Nguyen describes as a "single source of truth." The Qlik Analytics Platform also enables integration with SMC's Sugar CRM system, allowing staff to access meaningful analysis without having to switch between applications.

"We didn't have a huge IT department, so it was important that as analysts, we could take on responsibility for deploying Qlik without being technical experts," says Nguyen. "Developing a data warehouse takes a lot of time, but with Qlik we can pull in data from various databases, spreadsheets and even PDF files. It gives us a lot of flexibility."

"Back in the day I was creating hundreds of reports manually," adds Jenna Young, Strategic Pricing and Sales Analysis Manager at SMC.

"But deploying Qlik meant everyone had access to reliable data. It streamlined multiple processes and transformed efficiency across the organization – myself included."

A new approach to data and decisions

With Qlik now operating as both a conventional analytics platform and an embedded element within its CRM platform, the total number of Qlik users at SMC now stands in the thousands. All benefit from access to key data that provides a solid platform for planning.

"Managers can slice and dice data to whatever level they need to make the right decisions," says Nguyen. "We've moved past the days of 'my data is better than yours', and that's a real success story. It's also taught people throughout the organization to look at data in a consistent way to make the decisions even more effective."

Scott Wisker, Business Intelligence Group Supervisor at SMC, agrees, adding: "We're all looking at the same source of truth, but we're also all looking at the same thing at the same time. All our applications are updated and distributed almost simultaneously, and that's a huge plus."

SMC has now developed a range of applications with Qlik, and while initial implementations were developed to support sales analysis, the use cases have broadened significantly.

"We're finding important trends within industries, within customers, even within our two million individual part numbers, and in different market segments in the US and Canada," Young explains. "How people are evaluated, bonus structures and sales incentives are also based on that critical source. It places information at the fingertips of everyone, from our management teams to sales reps."

Wisker adds that Qlik also provides real-time insights into logistics, shipping times and order statuses, including a daily report for individual branch managers.

"People can see at a glance what's going on in any given branch or with any customer," he says. "If a huge order comes in, for example, they can instantly investigate and pull in resources to assist if needed."

Moving to the next level

Ohio-based technical advisory and data analysis firm InnoSource now handles much of the technical side of Qlik's applications, while SMC is effectively self-sufficient in terms of its build, deployment and day-to-day use.

“The relationship with InnoSource is great,” says Young. “It means we can focus on the analysis without having to worry about hiring software developers. We want to make sure our data is telling the truth and delivering value from an analytical perspective.”

SMC is now looking to take Qlik to yet more parts of SMC’s operations, in particular to extend its use with its Sugar CRM platform and investigate the possibilities offered by Qlik Cloud.

“There are so many things we want to take to the next level,” Nguyen notes. “There is potential for even better forecasting, to make our operations more customer-centric and to make Qlik a truly global tool for SMC. There are lots of doors we are yet to open.”

The keys to success



Significantly improved user experience



2 million part numbers tracked and analyzed

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About Qlik

Qlik’s vision is a data-literate world, where everyone can use data and analytics to improve decision-making and solve their most challenging problems. A private company, Qlik offers real-time data integration and analytics solutions, powered by Qlik Cloud, to close the gaps between data, insights and action. By transforming data into Active Intelligence, businesses can drive better decisions, improve revenue and profitability, and optimize customer relationships. Qlik serves more than 38,000 active customers in over 100 countries.

qlik.com



About InnoSource

InnoSource is a leading Human Resource, Staffing and Data Agency headquartered in Columbus, Ohio with five regional offices across the US. It places top candidates into rewarding careers, focusing on contract staffing for technical support and contact centers and managed services for entire business departments. Its On-Site Outsourcing services are an alternative to traditional outsourcing which allow clients to reduce risk and maximize output while still maintaining service levels.

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