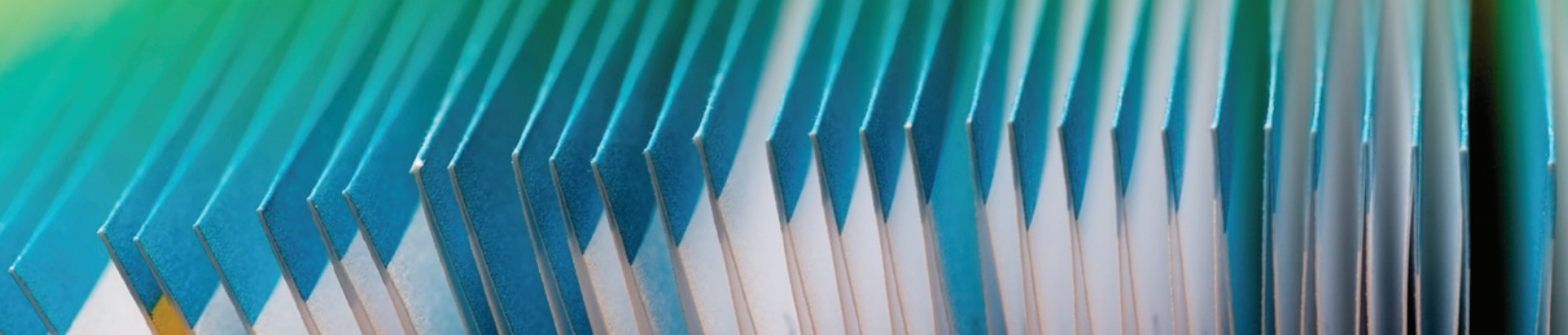


Merrill Corporation provides technology-enabled platforms for content sharing, regulated communications and disclosure services. Clients trust Merrill's innovative applications and deep subject expertise to successfully navigate the secure sharing of their most sensitive content, perfect and distribute critical financial and regulatory disclosures, and create customized communications across stakeholders. With more than 3,000 people in 34 locations worldwide, clients turn to Merrill when their need to manage complex content intersects with the need to collaborate securely around the globe.

The company serves the financial services and health insurance industries. Integrated order management, inventory monitoring and activity reporting solutions coupled with pick-and-pack, kitting and shipping capabilities are key to the company's print production offering.

Case Study Merrill Corp.

Merrill Corporation and Ironsides Partner to Achieve Error-Free Insertion Workflow



“With our previous process, if inserter counts differed from the expected number of pieces, it was a manual process to try to reconcile the error. With Ironsides APT, we can now, in real-time, determine to the page level where the error occurred and immediately correct it.”

– Mike Zimny, Director of Fulfillment Services

Challenge

With some days seeing as many as 500 jobs running through Merrill Corporation's inserter fleet in its Sartell, MN facility, the company was seeking a better way to validate insertion accuracy. When inserter counters didn't match the expected number of pieces, a time-consuming manual process was used to locate and correct the error. The company was also interested in better data about inserter operations.

Solution

Merrill Corporation chose Ironsides APT™ (Automated Production Tracking) from Ironsides Technology. Ironsides APT allows older and proprietary tracking methodologies and information management systems to be integrated creating a truly accessible, enterprise-wide job tracking and output management system. The end result is lower operating costs, improved delivery performance and reduced risk of compliance penalties and late delivery fees.

Results

Now if there are missing pieces or packets at the inserter, Ironsides APT reports and notifies the production team the exact record number that can then be used to automatically order a reprint. In addition to virtually reducing these errors to zero, Merrill can also use Ironsides APT to better manage its inserter fleet, providing visibility into machine and/or operator issues for a more efficient overall process.

“The granular level of reporting we have been able to achieve with Ironsides APT gives us a reliable audit trail, making sure each and every packet is accounted for and that we are in full regulatory compliance.”

– Mike Zimny, Director of Fulfillment Services

Leveraging Best Practices

Merrill Corporation initially implemented Ironsides APT in its Columbus, OH facility to serve the needs of a large client in the healthcare industry. Based on the success that was demonstrated in Columbus, Merrill added Ironsides APT to its Sartell, MN operation. The initial challenge was to find a better way of tracking jobs down to the page or packet level as they made their way through the inserting process.

“We learned a great deal from the Columbus implementation,” said Mike Zimny, Director of Fulfillment Services. “Our hope was to be able to achieve similar process improvements and savings in Sartell as we have in Columbus. While the initial challenge was ensuring reconciliation at the inserter level, we also believed there were many other synergies we could take advantage of.”

Vendor-Agnostic Solution

The Merrill facilities have inserter equipment from a variety of vendors. “The vendor-agnostic nature of Ironsides APT was important to us,” Zimny adds. “We wanted one software system that could aggregate the data from all of our inserters into a manageable report that could not only ensure inserter accuracy and regulatory compliance, but also enable us to keep track of machine downtime, operator issues and other factors, giving us insight into actions we could take to continuously improve our processes.”

In addition to the company’s experience with Ironsides APT in Columbus, the Sartell team benefited from Ironsides experts on site in Sartell working hand in hand to customize reporting, delivering operational data at a very granular level. “Ironsides listened to our needs,” Zimny said, “and together we made the necessary modifications to provide the needed analytics and to make our operators’ lives easier. They also worked with us to make sure the solution fit our environment and integrated well with our systems, rather than suggesting we change our processes or systems to fit their solution.”

102% Increase in Throughput, Improved Reporting and Tracking

In 2016, Merrill increased envelope insertions by 75% over 2015, and saw a 102% increase in throughput. “Part of that was due to acquiring new inserters,” Zimny explained. “But much of that improved productivity was also due to Ironsides APT. At the conclusion of a job, our operators can now immediately see if anything has been missed and correct it right away. No more hunt and peck looking for missing pieces.”

Zimny also reports that Ironsides APT helps with hand fulfillment, saying, “We had more than 700,000 kits last year that were hand scanned. Thanks to Ironsides APT, we have been able to significantly streamline that process, becoming faster and more mobile in creating the kits as well as tracking progress as kits moved through an automated conveyer system. Our production on hand fulfillment increased by a factor of three!”

Another benefit to Merrill lies in the detailed reporting that Ironsides provides. “If we receive an incident report from a client,” Zimny stated, “we can go back and prove exactly what happened. We have had several cases where we have been able to do so down to a very small scope, proving that the work was correctly produced. That has been extremely valuable to us and to our clients.”

Zimny and his team have been very impressed with Ironsides support. “So often, partnership with another organization is not measured on how well things go, but what they do when something is not going right. While we haven’t had many issues with the Ironsides APT solution, they are always there when we need them. Our partnership with Ironsides is a key factor in our ability to grow the business, bring new clients on board, and improve our overall operational excellence.”