



SMALL QUANTITY METAL SUPPLIER MAKES EASY TRANSITION TO ONEIR SOLUTIONS' LINUX-BASED ACCOUNTING

Robust accounting package coupled with superb customer support enables Philadelphia's Metal Stock Inc. to handle high-volume sales and growth
by Andy Shaw

You name it, and almost certainly Metal Stock has it - that special bar, sheet, plate, tube, or angle iron you need now, but can't buy in small quantity anywhere else. And even in the unlikely event that Metal Stock doesn't have your so-needed piece in stock today - be it made of aluminum, stainless steel, carbon steel, brass, bronze, or an alloy hot rolled, cold rolled, or heat treated and annealed - chances are you can pick it up or have it delivered tomorrow. What's more, you can have Metal Stock technicians take just about any metal of yours and precision cut it, plasma cut it, burn it, or shear it depending on its nature and your needs.

And you won't be alone. The needs for such metal products and services in the Delaware Valley around Philadelphia have been flourishing. The growing number of manufacturers, tool and dye makers, machine shops, and contractors in the region all naturally need metal parts. Add to these regular customers the Valley's government institutions, schools, hospitals, military bases and individual hobbyists among others and you have a burgeoning market for Metal Stock.

Most metal vendors and distributors in the area have responded to that increasing demand by consolidating their service centers and by catering mostly to those who buy in

large volumes. As a result, they left the many who require less by the wayside, facing longer delivery times and fewer choices.

Not so Metal Stock. It has kept its faith in the smaller buyer who doesn't want much but still needs fast, efficient service and a wide selection. Consequently, Metal Stock's business has boomed. So much so, that in 2004 president, Ken Bell, ended his company's 10-year relationship with a franchiser and set Metal Stock on an independent course, from which they have never looked back. By the fall of 2005, both Bell and his controller, Corinne Wightman, knew that to handle the company's swelling sales volume profitably they needed something with more power and capacity than their current accounting software from Vigilant. So from just across the Delaware River in Palmyra, New Jersey, they called in their computer consultant and president of VS Info Systems, Harry Van Steenacker.

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"They had been using Vigilant Solutions for 10 years and it was very, very reliable but it was no longer big enough for them," says Van Steenacker. "Their sales and staff had grown so much that they were well past the four or five users that

Vigilant was comfortably accommodating and were up to about 24 people who interacted with the accounting system every day. So they were constantly filling up their files, having to then purge them, and therefore losing much of their sales history. So that's when I helped them decide to make the move to Oneir Solutions."

The Oneir Solutions Business Accounting Software that Metal Stock chose, with Sales Order Taking and Invoicing for phone orders and for over-the-counter sales, Purchase Order Software and Inventory Management System for material requirements planning and customer relationship management, as well as Accounts Receivable Software, Accounts Payable Software, and General Ledger Software for financial control -- all have much the same look and feel as Vigilant's, since Oneir Solutions is the big brother of Vigilant. But Oneir Solutions Accounting comes set up on a customized server, which Oneir provides as part of its package and that runs on the highly reliable and yet very nimble Linux operating system. This set-up supplies not only a rock-solid foundation for applications running on the server but also makes it relatively easy to integrate new software with legacy applications.

"I've been in the computer business 40 years and one thing I've learned about it is that you can't ever know everything," admits Harry. "So I have to say that I was not very familiar with Linux-based systems. But thanks to the superb

support that Oneir Solutions purposely gives its resellers, I learned quickly that Linux is basically communications software. So it works beautifully with the Windows Terminal Services and that allows Metal Stock to manage Oneir Solutions alongside all its Windows-based applications very comfortably."

Harry agrees with Jon Mainwaring, Oneir Solutions Executive Vice President, when he says, "With Oneir, you get the best of both worlds!"

And so Metal Stock scheduled its shift to Oneir Solutions and did it over a weekend in order to keep business interruption to a minimum.

Harry co-coordinated the technical side of the transition while Corinne did the internal preparatory balancing and then verified the correctness of the converted data afterwards. "And as usual we were on call in Toronto during the weekend," says Mainwaring.

"We shut down on Saturday and opened up again on Monday morning," recalls Corinne, a former chartered public accountant (CPA) who says she has witnessed many transitions from one Accounting System to another in her career. "I came in to work on Monday with a bottle of vodka to help us get over all the problems I expected, but we didn't need the vodka. Everything was working. I was extremely impressed with the smoothness of the Vigilant-to-Oneir Solutions transition."

That migration also meant no more disruptive shutdowns for Corinne and Metal Stock.

"The first big benefit the change to Oneir Solutions meant for us was more space," says Corinne. "We sell a lot of small items here so there are a lot of invoices. And before I had to remove things like paid invoices and Purchase Orders

from our storage files. With the way we were growing, it meant that every three months or so I had to shut down in the middle of an afternoon because the system was full. With Oneir Solutions, I haven't had to shut down at all."

Nor has there been much of a time-robbing learning curve for Metal Stock staff.

"It is such an easy system to use because it is not complicated. So there was no training or adjustment time needed for me. And that surprised me, because as a CPA I have gone through transitions with other companies that have been nightmares," says Corinne. "I had set aside a lot of hours to train each of our six salesmen on the new system. But I ended up spending about half an hour doing it."

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Corinne credits not only Harry Van Steenacker's careful planning for the ease of transition but also direct help from Oneir Solutions technical support folks ahead of time.

"They went through all our records with me to see if they were all ready for conversion," explains Corinne. "We spotted a few things that didn't look right so together we fixed them. In previous transitions I've experienced, all your data may come over but many times things like financial statements you've customized and set up do not make it. So you have to create and put them all back into the system again. I've had to do that many times. But in this case with Oneir Solutions, everything came over. I didn't have to re-customize anything."

Concludes consultant Van Steenacker, "You don't need Customer Support very often because they have such solid applications, but when you do need it, Vigilant and now Oneir Solutions, is the best in the world. They don't outsource their support and they have real solutions for real problems."

That's not happened overnight, says Oneir Solutions president, Jane Giggall. "We've built up a vast amount of know-how over the past 20 years about what both customers and resellers need, so we're structured to fill in the gaps in their knowledge. We can help them, and we can do it online remotely, without their needing much expertise themselves."

For another president, Ken Bell of Metal Stock, the smooth transition to Oneir Solutions means he can get on quickly with growing the company. Already one of the biggest small-quantity metal suppliers in North America with more than 2,000 customers and several thousand items stocked in and sold from Metal Stock's 37,500 square-foot facility, Ken is thinking expansion.

What Oneir Solutions has really done for us is open up our bottom line," says Ken. "We know that it's extremely reliable and it can do some sophisticated reporting. The sales analysis reports that Corinne generates from it, for example, show us what percentage of our sales is coming from which customers, and how that is changing from year to year. So we can make plans for growth based on some hard facts."

About as hard, durable, and reliable as the products and services Metal Stock itself sells.

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