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GARY BALCER | SENIOR IT BUSINESS ANALYST

# Tubelite

*Manufacturer and distributor of architectural aluminum products improves inventory management and picking accuracy with RFgen Mobile Foundations for Oracle's JD Edwards.*

## At a glance...

**Industry**
Construction

**Applications**
Inventory Management
Manufacturing
Sales Order Processing
Receiving

**Environment**
Oracle's JD Edwards
EnterpriseOne 9.0

Since 1945, architects and glazing contractors have trusted fabricated architectural products from Tubelite, Inc. to create attractive, durable and eco-efficient storefronts, entrance systems and curtainwalls for commercial buildings. The company has an aluminum extrusion plant in Reed City, Michigan, and two fabrication, warehouse and shipping operations in Walker, Michigan and Dallas, Texas. Tubelite is part of Apogee Enterprises, Inc., an industry leader in distinctive glass and metal solutions that earns over $1.5 billion in annual revenues and is headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

### The Challenge

Tubelite creates its architectural products from aluminum. The Reed City manufacturing plant produces extruded aluminum, which is then transferred to its fabrication and warehouse facilities. In those two plants, employees use work orders to create finished products and then use sales orders to pick finished products to send to customers for construction projects.

Several years ago, Tubelite was experiencing more order mistakes than it wanted. Senior IT Business Analyst, Gary Balcer explained, "A lot of our parts look very similar in profile, so our workers sometimes picked the wrong part. We did not want incorrect orders going out to customers, so we looked for ways to improve our procedures."

The company decided to enhance warehouse and shop floor operations by implementing a Mobile Application Development Platform (MADP) to improve both inventory visibility and the accuracy of sales order and work order pick processes.

### The Solution

Based on recommendations from their JD Edwards consultant, Tubelite selected RFgen Mobile Foundations for Oracle's JD Edwards to automate the data collection process throughout their operations. RFgen provides a suite of pre-written, pre-tested Oracle-validated mobile applications to deliver real-time inventory tracking using barcoding throughout the enterprise. RFgen helps boost efficiency, increase accuracy, and reduce cost for manufacturers and distributors.

Tubelite deployed mobile apps for manufacturing, inventory management, receiving and sales order processing. RFgen mobile apps can be customized easily to match unique business workflows, either by a company's in-house IT developers or, as was the case with Tubelite, by utilizing RFgen's expert team of software engineers. Balcer was impressed with the technical ERP knowledge demonstrated by RFgen developers.

"Our RFgen software engineer really understands not only RFgen, but also JD Edwards. When we talk to him about it and we explain what we want to do, he is very good to work with," said Balcer.

**RFgen**

## The Result

Using mobile barcode scanners with RFgen in the warehouse, Tubelite improved picking accuracy and efficiency for both work orders and sales orders, reducing costs. Overall, the mobile data collection project was completed under budget, with a small savings on both RFgen development costs and barcode scanner hardware. Using RFgen has enabled the team at Tubelite's Walker fabrication and warehouse facility to:

- Create custom mobile apps for sales order and work order picking that exactly match the company's existing workflows.

- Increase picking accuracy and improve order fulfillment, resulting in fewer returns.

- Fulfill more orders without adding any additional pickers, saving approximately $300,000 per year in warehouse labor costs.

- Reduce picker downtime by 50%, saving about $30,000 per year.

### Increased Picking and Fulfillment Accuracy

The RFgen team developed custom mobile apps to facilitate Tubelite's work order and sales order picking processes. Combining their new picking apps with wireless barcode scanners has increased the accuracy of both work orders and sales fulfillment.

"Now, we've got containers, work orders and pick lists barcoded," explained Balcer. "Putaway locations are also barcoded, making it easy to locate containers in the warehouse. When our workers pick work orders and sales orders, the pick comes up on the RFgen screen on their barcode scanners. There is very rarely an error as far as picking the wrong part now. They just go to the location, scan the location, and scan the container. With RFgen, we have reduced errors quite a bit."

Barcoding containers as well as putaway locations in the warehouse has greatly improved inventory visibility and accuracy in all inventory transactions. "We haven't had any major inventory issues. Our on-time delivery of products went up, because we're not shipping incorrect parts anymore," Balcer said.

### Higher Productivity and Cost Savings

RFgen helps increase worker productivity by eliminating the need to re-key data into the ERP system. Instead, Tubelite employees simply scan barcode labels to capture information about materials and parts, including lot numbers or part numbers, dates, quantities and locations. RFgen automatically exchanges this information in real-time between the barcode scanners and JD Edwards.

"With RFgen, we have had about a 50% reduction in the time spent searching for parts, because now employees use the barcode scanners and RFgen directs them to which location to visit," said Balcer. "Picker downtime was reduced from 30% to 15%, and that saves an additional $30,000 a year.

All of these gains add up to better warehouse and shop floor productivity. Because employees can accomplish more tasks with less effort, labor utilization has improved.

"Since implementing RFgen, we haven't needed to hire additional pickers, and we have saved approximately $300,000 a year by not adding labor around the shop floor," Balcer said.

Based on the success of the initial RFgen deployment in Walker, Tubelite is moving forward quickly with deployments in the Reed City extrusion plant and the fabrication facility in Dallas.

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