



**think
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CUSTOMER SUCCESS STORY WILA

WILA is a leading manufacturer of tool systems for press brake machines and is located in Lochem. As one of the very first Thinkwise users, Wila has been working with the platform, which supports its entire business process, for over ten years. Furthermore, they are still working on the software on a daily basis to ensure that it integrates seamlessly with both the internal and external business processes.

WILA was founded in 1932 in the Lochem area as a traditional forge. It gradually specialized to become an innovative manufacturer of high-quality tool systems for press brakes and for the (steel) plate processing industry. The company has a worldwide reputation, with its head office and two production sites with approximately 320 employees in Lochem and offices and warehouses in the United States and China., WILA developed various patented concepts, such as the New Standard System. This is a user-friendly system for quickly changing bending tools on press brake machines, which are used to bend steel plates into the desired shape. WILA has been working with the Thinkwise platform since 2005 and has modeled its entire preparation and production process into highly efficient business applications. John Sangers, ICT Manager, has been involved in the process from the very beginning and is continuously working on the expansion and fine-tuning of the business software. "After more than ten years, we are still extremely enthusiastic about the Thinkwise Platform," says John. "The Thinkwise Platform enables us to build applications that optimally support our business processes while at the same time focusing on expanding and optimizing these processes."

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John Sangers
ICT Manager WILA

Supporting growth and innovation

The period around 2005 was an important turning point for WILA. The company had grown strongly during the prior ten-year period, which was partly due to the successful introduction of a new standard tool system for the sheet metal industry. Operational management was supported by an in-house developed ERP system which covered almost all the core business processes, from finance, sales and logistics through to purchasing and production planning. Unfortunately, this system required a lot of manual input and left much to be desired in terms of ease of use. John, who had been with WILA for 25 years, was initially asked to further develop this system, but he soon realized that they required new business software that could grow with WILA's high ambitions and would be better suited to the processes that had changed in the meantime.



“Everything had to become much more user-friendly,” says John. “With the advent of Windows, people wanted to click instead of using complex shortcut keys and screens. It was time for something new. We had the choice to either redevelop our own software once again, or select a standard package.”

But, as John says, WILA is a headstrong company that wants to determine how it sets up and optimizes its processes for itself. “We did look at some generic ERP packages but they did not match our requirements. According to consultants, everything is possible with these packages, but if you want to implement specific wishes or working methods, it suddenly becomes very difficult with complicated customization. When we got in contact with Thinkwise, what they said in effect was: ‘give us your data and we will convert it into a software package.’ That sounded perfect, so we decided to do a test implementation. Within a day Thinkwise had realized a number of application screens that made us decide to redevelop our entire ERP package together with Thinkwise.”

Project and development

Within a year and a half, WILA and Thinkwise built a new version of the legacy software package, including all the existing functions. In addition, the foundation was laid to enable quick and flexible expansion of the software with new functionality and further optimization of the processes.

After the delivery, WILA took over the management of the solution, which meant that the immediate involvement of Thinkwise stopped. During this period, the company gained a lot of experience with the Thinkwise platform, but as they went along, they discovered that there are benefits in once again engaging Thinkwise and making use of the latest updates.

John Sangers: “Initially it was quite challenging to realign with the latest version of the Thinkwise Platform, as we had developed and added quite a lot of our own functionality over the years. But since then, Thinkwise had also implemented quite a few model extensions and convenient user interfaces in the platform, which came in very useful. Since 2017, our business software has been fully updated and future updates are no longer a problem.”

Results

The WILA application was named WISWISE, a combination of WILA Information System and Thinkwise. Today, the application supports the entire WILA logistics process, including an integration with the webshop. In the webshop, customers can order products online and even configure customized products with a product generator.

“We want to make everything in WISWISE as efficient as possible,” says John. “We even have an online tool that allows customers to design their own new products. All specifications are entered into the system directly from the webshop. Subsequently, a quotation is produced automatically and if it is approved, the orders, the product preparation, the production and finally the delivery will follow. All this data is in our system, including a 3D model, documents, part lists & routings and even NC programs that automatically control the machines.”

According to John, these things cannot be achieved with a generic ERP package: “You can always find a module to suit your requirements, but never something that fits exactly. And that means that you would still get makeshift constructions and customizations, or you would still have to use Excel or peripheral applications. We simply want one single integrated solution for all our activities. This has always been our main principle: if information is created somewhere, then that is where we want to enter it into our system. Not via a roundabout route, such as a phone call or an e-mail. It is all about efficiency and we constantly see opportunities for improvement in this area.”

Easy to use

WISWISE is an extremely user-friendly software application. “When I explain to new employees and interns, they always tell me that it is an extremely convenient system and is very easy to use”, says John. “All the information is always available in the right place and according to them it is not as laborious as software from companies such as SAP and Oracle that they have come across at other companies. I always tell them that we are open to suggestions for improvement, consider them seriously and implement them when possible.” WILA frequently receives other companies, that are considering using Thinkwise, for a reference visit. According to John the visiting companies are often very enthusiastic.

“They can see for themselves how user-friendly the system is and how some functions from the platform could be directly applied in their own situation. A number of these companies have also opted for Thinkwise.”

According to John, the software enables these companies to focus on optimizing their business process, without being restricted by complex IT systems. “You don’t need to settle for a generic software solution that forces you to work with predefined screens, lists and quick filters. With Thinkwise we focus purely on what we are good at, because the software optimally supports our processes.”

America and China

WILA is very satisfied with WISWISE, but according to John the focus remains on optimizing the solution. “We have absolutely no need for any other software, despite the fact that we have been using Thinkwise for more than ten years now. Most companies are ready for something else after such a long time, or they have become inundated with peripheral applications.”

Apart from the two WILA locations in Lochem, the American and Chinese branches are now also working with WISWISE. “All their purchasing is processed automatically through our system, from orders to production and delivery.” These locations sometimes have their own specific challenges, for which the speed and flexibility of Thinkwise proves very useful. John Sangers: “We recently paid a visit to our office in China, where we discovered that they maintained an administrative process that is unique in China, by using a lot of copy and pasting in Excel spreadsheets. We explained to them that we could automate this perfectly in the software and this has now been agreed on. We also have plans to start production in China this year, which we intend to manage entirely from the Netherlands. This is going to be a very interesting challenge, but it keeps us busy.”