



Q&A with SICO America Inc.

The transition to 3D modeling Q&A with Jim Bradley, Engineering Manager and Lori Ahern, IT Manager, SICO America Inc.

For over 50 years, SICO® has been a leading, worldwide manufacturer of mobile folding products to help businesses maximize the efficient use of their space. From their portable dance floors to their full line of mobile folding tables and easy to use mobile folding stages, they offer a host of innovative products that offer ingenuity and quality.

- 1 *SICO has been migrating from 2D drafting tools to the next generation of 3D modeling with Autodesk Inventor along with Autodesk Vault. Can you tell us what you've been working on since that decision was made and where the implementation stands today?*

The CAD tool in Inventor has been phenomenal for SICO! It is doing everything we needed and more. The speed of the drawing management system and the viewing function has been highly functional across our wide-area network with multiple users. And the copy/design feature has been a real benefit to our organization: we do a lot of "specials" – modified standard products – and these are created quickly and easily. The cumulative effect of these features has been tremendous productivity gains for our staff, even though we haven't yet been able to fully leverage Inventor's capabilities for data management.

We are continuing to convert and clean up our existing data and realize this is an ongoing process due to the large amount of legacy data we have. We were also hoping to have different functionality with batch printing – it works, but not in the way we specified, during the vetting process. Despite that shortfall, however, our people are much more advanced and productive than ever before.

- 2 *Moving to Inventor and Vault in a digital design environment offers some obvious and not-so-obvious benefits. Can you cite a few key reasons why this decision was made, and the specific benefits you were looking to achieve?*

The story actually begins many years ago. Dating back to 1951, we have accumulated legacy data across 5 different platforms, including TIFFs, Mechanical Desktop and AutoCAD – all of which we use every day. Along with the differences between those formats, our people were also at various levels of productivity. We needed a platform that would eventually accommodate those different formats and was user-friendly enough for everybody to be able to use it at their individual skill level, and we needed to decrease the time necessary to complete jobs and get them to the manufacturing floor.

As far as specific benefits, there have been many. Some of the main ones for us are:

- Productivity gains (decreasing the time necessary to complete jobs)
- Getting our entire staff productive (drawing) while reducing their learning curve
- Increased use of animation function (although we need to continue growing in this function)
- Metric to imperial conversion factor (we have an affiliate in Europe already using Inventor, so it has saved us the manual process of conversion we had to perform in the past)
- Standardization on one product/platform/solution across all our locations
- Isometric views (visualization of the part is much easier to do for the entire organization, and people on the manufacturing floor can now better understand what the final product is supposed to look like)

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However, the biggest benefit to using Inventor is that, with training, our entire engineering staff is now able to utilize the software to draw – including people we thought would never be able to use a CAD system. One individual jumped directly from AutoCAD to Inventor, bypassing Mechanical Desktop entirely and is already creating modified specials.

- 3 Some parts of the manufacturing community do not fully understand the value and downstream benefits of 3D digital design and data management. Do you have any words of encouragement for them at this point?*

The response of our management and executive team is perhaps the best endorsement I've seen yet. As we're getting more projects completed in Inventor they are starting to see the benefits with functionality such as visualization.

- 4 One concern that some companies seem to have about transitioning to Inventor and Vault is the availability of resources to help them migrate to these platforms. What other resources might you recommend companies consider to learn more about this transition?*

I strongly suggest that you compare different solutions and partners at the outset – perform your due diligence. Make sure that you think about the implementation/ migration as a process, and identify a partner who is concerned about your process – as well as your data and products. Fully involve your IT resources ensuring compatibility and with existing platforms, legacy systems and hardware as well as future systems planned.

- 5 What advice or recommendations can you offer to ensure a successful implementation?*

One key step is to identify champions within your organization who will help see the implementation through to completion. Leverage them. And when you commit to the new solution, commit fully: convert everybody to the new platform and get your data right into the Vault.

Engineering standards should be established as the foundation for all the work you will do moving forward. These will really promote productivity gains as everybody gets on that elusive "same page."

Training is essential. We actually split training up into basic and advanced groups, then allowed them some time for practice and even a trial before continuing with a "next level" training for each group. This allowed our users to develop at an appropriate and manageable pace: Our low-end users are getting the fundamentals down pat while advanced users are tackling some of the higher functionality. The end result is to get the entire engineering staff at an equally high skill level.

6

Were there any specific challenges that you faced and how did you address them?

One of our biggest challenges was a fear of change among the engineering staff. Having gone through so many different platforms in the past with such different levels of success (or lack of success), people were concerned what impact this change would have for their careers. So prior to the implementation we had both Autodesk and MasterGraphics come in and present the solution to us and answer questions. This gave everybody a sense of involvement and ownership, which in turn led to enthusiasm for the new solution.

7

What are the next steps for your team?

Our first priority is to continue with an ongoing training program to continue to build skill levels. Clearly, another important step will be to continue with and complete our data conversion and clean-up. Once this is completed, we will be able to turn on the item master control.

Another priority for us is upgrading to Inventor 2011 this fall and providing our engineering staff with new hardware (64 bit system and Windows 7 operating system) so that we can further accelerate our productivity gains.

Visit the SICO America Inc. website: www.sicoinc.com

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