TrueNorth Avionics Innovation Flies High

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ARENA CASE STUDY

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How does an emerging company compete with larger firms and win? Easy. Out-innovate them.

Heads of State, Fortune 50 executives and discerning VIPs rely on the airborne telecommunications technologies of TrueNorth Avionics to stay connected while they're in flight. The company's products outfit private, VIP business jets. With full telecommunications capabilities available, high-powered passengers can turn otherwise nonproductive, "out-of-touch" time in the air into useful working time, or—in the midst of a hectic and grueling travel schedule—grab a few moments to stay in touch with family and loved ones. Because TrueNorth Avionics delivers the ability to make critical phone calls, send and receive faxes, connect to the Internet and send email—regardless of location—the company's products are in high demand, and its client base continues to grow rapidly.



Nimble and relatively new in its market, TrueNorth Avionics faces intense competitive pressure from industry giants, many times its size. The company's strategy? Out-maneuver and out-innovate the competition.

It's all about control

"Time to market is very critical for us, and so is efficiency," says Chris Bartlett, director of product management at TrueNorth Avionics. "We need to continually incorporate the latest features into our products. At the same time, we have to stay quick, be more nimble and accomplish more with less."

Six years of rapid growth—including the establishment of international offices—created challenges for TrueNorth Avionics. "The demand for our solutions and our resulting growth put a strain on our product development processes. We pride ourselves on rapid time to market, but we recognized that we also needed to maintain the tight controls that preserve the high quality of our solutions," says Bartlett.

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In 2011, TrueNorth Avionics implemented cloud-based NetSuite ERP to provide greater control over some of its data and operational processes. With the ERP system in place, the company recognized an additional need. Managers who used the new ERP system to make crisp, timely decisions needed assurance that the product revision data and document approvals reflected in NetSuite were exact, precise, up-to-date data.

"We needed to control documents—specifically bills of materials (BOMs) and the associated items in BOMs," notes Bartlett. "We wanted the ability to collaborate on products across multiple sites, and required very tight controls on revisions, approvals, releasing products into production, managing product life cycles, and tracking changes to documents associated with components. We needed all of it."

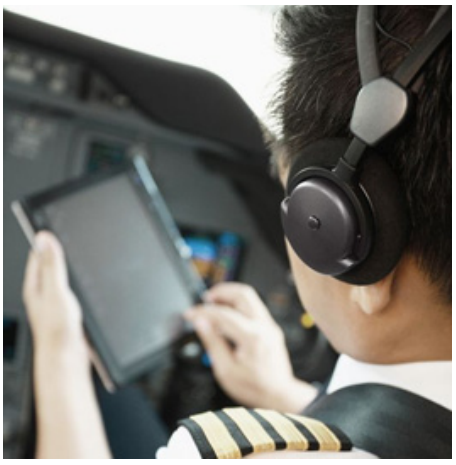
Cloud-based PLM

To help control product changes, coordinate their supply chain and continue scaling production to meet demand, TrueNorth Avionics turned to Arena's cloud-based PLM application.

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A cloud-based system offers important advantages, Bartlett says, "such as avoiding tying up IT resources. Add Arena's ability to fully integrate with NetSuite, and the TrueNorth Avionics decision was made."

Since the implementation, Bartlett and his team can more readily maintain accuracy within and across multiple bills of materials without having to open up each BOM individually. Engineering change orders (ECOs) move quickly through review processes with less delay, fewer opportunities for error, and greater efficiency.



TrueNorth Avionics now keeps all core product data within Arena PLM, which in turn integrates with NetSuite. When a change takes place on the engineering side of the house, NetSuite is automatically updated with the information in the appropriate areas. Everyone has access to the up-to-date and accurate information that lets decision-making move along quickly. "Increased control, along with a single point of approval for changes, has increased the quality of our data substantially and given us added confidence in our ERP system."

ARENA PLM

Arena PLM is a cloud-based solution for BOM management and product change management. It bridges the gap between design, engineering and production by a controlled, centralized way to manage changes to the product. Real-time accurate product information can be accessed anytime from anywhere in the world.

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Bartlett provides an example of how the company's recent system improvements have impacted TrueNorth Avionics. "Our CTO is the key driver of our product development, and his time is frequently at a premium. Before adopting Arena PLM, his time was often consumed as we struggled to sort out BOM changes, documentation changes and assembly instruction changes. He's been freed from much of that now. By following our process with Arena PLM, he easily logs in, checks his dashboard to see what needs his attention or approval, and moves on to other critical issues."

Expanding sales opportunities

As a result of the implementation, TrueNorth Avionics was also able to complete a critical audit to earn its first-ever AS9100 certification. AS9100 certification demonstrates the company's ability to achieve the highest level of quality in manufacturing in the aerospace industry. Importantly, AS9100 certification is required to sell to OEMs in TrueNorth Avionics' target markets, an important expansion of its sales opportunities.



Says Bartlett, "Arena PLM was a significant contributor to the successful completion of our AS9100 audit. It enabled us to demonstrate crucial controls over our processes and over the integration into our ERP system. We demonstrated our ability to track changes down to the user and date. We demonstrated our ability to maintain tight control over ECO changes to a BOM and see new revisions of documents, assembly drawings or anything associated with our manufacturing that we contain in Arena PLM. All of these capabilities leading to the certification provided positive validation of our decision to implement Arena PLM."

Return on Investment:

- Improved collaboration on products
- Tighter controls and tracking of product changes
- Successful certification process allowed new sales