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Exceeding Expectations

Erie Insurance turns to BÖWE BELL + HOWELL for faster, more reliable solutions

Erie Insurance Group's Jack Gorman knows the value of an outstanding document-processing solution. As manager of Erie Insurance's Distribution Services department, Gorman and his team handle virtually every document produced by the 83-year-old multi-line insurer—from policy notices and bills to marketing materials, underwriting documents and claims forms. In total, the group mailed more than 26 million documents in 2007.

To effectively handle that kind of volume, Gorman needed a first-rate production environment, but his mixed equipment shop was slowing down. Aging equipment demanded excessive setup, caused needless downtime and provided little process automation.

Seeing the need to upgrade, Gorman assembled a team from within Erie Insurance to help him select new equipment. Inviting representatives from Purchasing, Information Technology and Distribution Services, Gorman charged each with investigating possible solutions, keeping in mind Erie Insurance's two primary concerns: document security and increased productivity. Team members were also asked to consider engineering, ease of operations, value, installation ease and integrity.

A unanimous decision

After weeks of research, discussions and demonstrations, Erie Insurance chose three BÖWE BELL + HOWELL (BBH)

machines for their facility: two Enduro® inserting systems and one Combo® inserting system, a versatile high-speed inserter that handles both letters and flats—a feature that provides Gorman with the knowledge their investment will pay future dividends as their needs change.

"Our decision was unanimous, but each member of our search team had a unique reason for selecting BBH

products," said Gorman. "Our Purchasing representative cited the fair price. Our IT person liked the reliability of the machines. One operator pointed out machine speed; another praised the machines' exceptional engineering. These machines met—and exceeded—every requirement we had for them."

Those requirements included the need for flexibility. "We produce a wide variety of documents, from single-page statements to bulky policy booklets. We also produce a high volume of documents, so efficiency and throughput were critical," said Gorman. "This led us to look for flexible solutions, ones that would offer a return on investment for years to come. We've found that the Combo is the benchmark when it comes to adaptable, dependable inserting systems."

The Combo inserter enables operators to change over from

letters to flats in a matter of minutes, not hours. As Erie Insurance's needs change, the versatility of the system provides long-range solutions for their high-volume production requirements. "Our investment in Combo will



Jack Gorman
Manager of Distribution Services
Erie Insurance

deliver even greater returns as we fully implement all of its technological advantages,” said Gorman.

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The Combo features EASE™ (Every Application Setup Easily), which dramatically reduces the number of steps required to change over from one job to another. EASE includes a wide range of innovations including interlaced guide adjustments, uniform hinge-line registration and unique channel modules. The patent-pending Control Document Collator allows the operator to collate the control document and the inserts in a variety of ways. With combined modular components, operating system functionality and the Control Document Collator, users are able to process a wide variety of documents quickly and easily.

The Combo provided another bonus. “The incredible speed of the system is another key element. We expected swift changeovers, but the sheer volume that Combo handles is extremely impressive,” said Gorman.

While Gorman went into the equipment selection process without bias, he and his crew appreciated the help they received from BBH sales representative Chris Angiers, who Gorman met during his first days at Erie Insurance. “Chris made it his job to understand our process and our pain points from the outset,” said Gorman. “He did a lot of groundwork for us and invested a lot of time in helping research our options. He knew that we were considering other equipment, but he was confident that the BBH machines would sell themselves—and they did.”

The three pieces were installed in December 2007 and January 2008 in what Gorman called an exceedingly easy process. “I’ve been in the document production field for more than 25 years, and this is by far the

best installation I’ve ever seen,” said Gorman. Thanks to careful planning and coordination on the part of the BBH project manager, Erie Insurance hardly felt a pause in production. “We saw very minimal interruption,” he said.

Saving time, saving money

Gorman’s machines have been running strong ever since. Thanks to in-track sensors and the BÖWE Group’s VEKtor™ technology, Gorman said, he and his team are confident in the integrity of their process. The Combo, along with the Enduros, has also made possible significant improvements in efficiency. Using old systems, substantial overtime work was required to simply meet deadlines and regulatory requirements. The new machines, however, process so quickly and reliably that downtime has been all but eliminated and actual overtime hours are 90 percent below hours forecasted. “That’s an incredible savings for us,” said Gorman.



Increased efficiency has led to cost savings in other areas as well. Prior to the equipment upgrade, Erie Insurance outsourced the assembly of some forms packets to a third party. Now, thanks to its expanded capacity, Distribution Services produces the packets in-house on an as-needed basis, ultimately trimming outsourcing costs and eliminating the need to store large quantities of extra forms.

Since replacing other inserter brands and refreshing his production floor with new BBH machines, Gorman said his operators have come to appreciate the single-vendor lineup. As the pieces share similar operational procedures, the people running them need to be familiar with just one process and don't waste time familiarizing themselves with different machines. "That unified design helps make our operations more streamlined—and lets us make every minute count."

When discussing his new production environment, Gorman is quick to point out an additional benefit: Erie Insurance decided to support its BBH-exclusive shop with dedicated, on-site service. BBH's in-house technician provides consistent feedback on operational issues and helps diagnose possible problems before they interfere with production. When the rare problem occurs, BÖWE BELL + HOWELL's in-house expert provides service immediately. "That's a huge concern here in northwestern Pennsylvania, especially since we're somewhat isolated and subject to intense winter storms," said Gorman. "If something goes wrong with our equipment, I don't have to wait hours—or days—for someone to travel to me. We've got our BBH expert right here, working alongside of us the entire time. He knows our equipment, he knows our process and he gets us back up and running."

The right choice

When Erie Insurance Group began considering new document-processing solutions, they were looking for high-quality equipment with a good reputation and at a fair price. With BBH, said Gorman, they found all that and more.

"BÖWE BELL + HOWELL isn't just a vendor—the company is a true partner in our success," said Gorman. "BBH was, without a doubt, the right choice for us."

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