

Cross Scale System Helps Commonwealth Brands Gather Data to Reduce Waste by 30%



Commonwealth Brands is part of the Imperial Tobacco Group and a long-time Cross customer. The company produces the Malibu, USA Gold and Sonoma cigarette brands, among others, as well as loose cigarette tobacco and cigarette tubes in their Reidsville, NC facility.

Commonwealth recently launched their Organisational Excellence Programme, or OEP, a continuous improvement initiative based on LEAN principles. Said John McPherson, Commonwealth's Secondary Production Manager, "OEP is all about driving performance through increasing Overall Equipment Effectiveness (OEE) and minimizing waste."

McPherson said, "We saw we had a waste problem, but we couldn't pinpoint where it was coming from. We needed the transparency of understanding where our waste was being generated with a view to reducing it." Cross and Commonwealth Brands have a historic relationship going back several decades, with Cross providing calibration for their scales and precision measurement equipment. Because of this working relationship, Commonwealth called Cross first when starting to specify a system to identify and track waste.

"Our current equipment couldn't provide the measurements we needed, so Cross designed and manufactured a custom system to our specification. Within the specification, we also required the ability to have future modification, to have full admin rights to expand or modify the scope of the process if we needed to in the future," said McPherson. Cross Application Engineer Tom Huff, working with the company's engineering department, designed a system to measure tobacco rejects from cigarette makers and packers and a second for non-tobacco material rejects from tube manufacturing machines. Each involved pairing an Avery Weigh-Tronix E1310 indicator with a Pennsylvania 6600 5,000lb capacity floor scale, with custom software, barcode scanners, Ethernet modules and PC-based software.

Cross Scale System Helps Commonwealth Brands Gather Data to Reduce Waste by 30%



Said Huff, "Commonwealth wanted to be able to see information on the waste that was being generated by area, by shift and by machine to identify the problem areas. It was integrated, via Ethernet, into their existing IT infrastructure, to allow data to be captured without adding time to their process." The system was operational and gathering data just four weeks after the two companies began specifying it, something that was crucial to the OEP project. "Cross had a level of experience and understanding that made the spec'ing very easy, with resident IT experts with the experience to provide what we asked for," said McPherson.

After several months of data gathering, Commonwealth asked Cross' engineering department to modify the software to allow additional reports to be generated. "Once we started gathering the initial information, we could see the advantages of seeing trending data differently. The IT system was expanded to give us greater ability to interrogate the data," said McPherson. With OEP now in a continuous improvement phase, Commonwealth has analyzed the data from the earlier stages of the project. "We have seen up to a 30% reduction in waste by being able to identify the starting waste level and being able to derive actions, incorporating LEAN principles, to reduce that waste," said McPherson.

McPherson said Cross' measurement expertise made designing and installing the waste data system simple and easy. "They were experienced and flexible, with systems in place to make a custom design to a customer's specification. The response time was excellent, the price reasonable and the level of professionalism excellent." With the acquisition of several brands from Reynolds American as part of their purchase of Lorillard, Inc., Imperial Tobacco (ITG Brands) will become the third largest cigarette producer in the United States. Cross has successfully helped Commonwealth to streamline their production process, allowing efficient operation in the current company, which should also benefit future manufacturing.