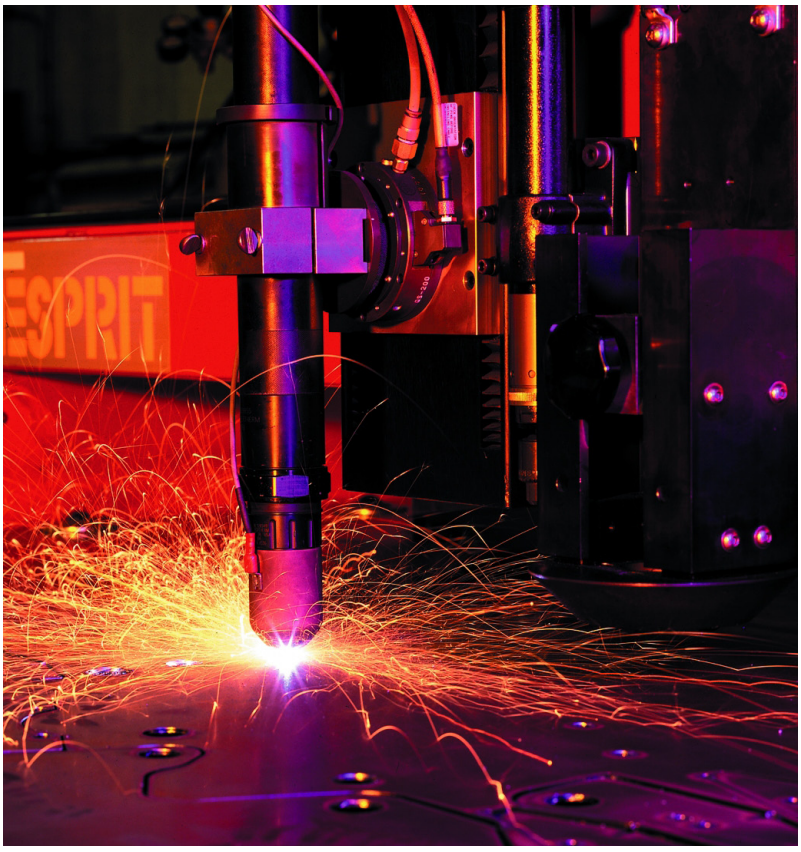
Lantek Solutions

Lantek Integra ERP gives C. Brown and Sons the tools to rationalize its business. To get the benefits of an integrated manufacturing and management system, C. Brown and Sons (Steel) Ltd installed Lantek's Integra suite of CADCAM and ERP software. Based in Dudley, West Midlands, C. Brown is a privately owned company which was first established in 1946 and, as a steel stockholder, processes mild steel parts for its customers in the yellow goods, construction and general fabrication markets, servicing major UK OEMs and their supply chains.

lantek C. Brown and Sons

The company works with both heavy and light strip steel from 0.8mm to 15 mm thick, uncoiling, levelling and cutting it to length, followed by plasma, flame or laser cutting to suit the customer's requirements. In 2011, the company processed over 100,000 tonnes of sheet and plate. Julian Adkins, Marketing Director for C. Brown says, "We had islands of software dedicated to the CNC programming of each individual machine, and this seriously affected our flexibility as, if we needed to move production to a different machine, we had to program it over again. We realized that we needed one CAM system to program all the machines, and a management system which integrated with it to run our whole business."



The company investigated several potential solutions before selecting Lantek. "We wanted a joined up solution which was within budget. Lantek Integra was the only one we could find which suited our requirements."

The Lantek Integra ERP system ties together all the manufacturing functions. It includes customer relationship management, a Sales module and a Purchasing module. Integrated with this is the Lantek Expert CADCAM system for nesting and programming parts for the laser, plasma and flame cut machines from the customer's CAD data or drawings; the Warehouse module which manages stock control and traceability; the Manager module which controls capacity on the shop floor; and the Lantek Wos module which keeps track of the progress of each job through the workshop.

Julian Adkins elaborates, "We use the CRM module to manage our customer and supplier relationships in real-time and to generate new and accurate quotations, while with the Sales module we can track sales orders and the progress of manufacture. The Purchasing module lets us keep control of delivery expectations, goods received, current prices and up to date contact details for our suppliers.

The Warehouse module monitors stock levels and allows us to attach documentation to each product. This is very important to us, as we need to maintain full traceability by keeping records of items such as material test certificates, material batch and supplier records, and goods received notes, allowing us to go right back to the original coil of steel."

The Lantek Manager module takes details of each order from the Sales module allowing Lantek Expert to nest and program each machine. Julian Adkins describes the process, "The Manager system works on 'buckets' of capacity, so it sorts the requirements by the type of steel, S275 for example, and then again by thickness. Typically we could have 35 different jobs running at any one time in each thickness, and there could be 100 parts in each job, all of different shapes, making it quite a complex problem to resolve. These 'buckets' of requirement then go to the Lantek Expert CADCAM system, where they are automatically nested into our standard sheet sizes and the CNC program generated. Material sizes range from 2000 x 1000 to 4000 x 2000. Our aim is to achieve at least 80% material utilization."

By using the nesting capabilities of Lantek Expert the company can produce realistic costings for difficult shaped jobs which are hard to nest, or require very short delivery times. For the majority of its work, using the same methods, it can also easily calculate robust prices for its customers based on the mix of work currently being manufactured. As C. Brown can now reflect the true cost of manufacture in its quotations it can ensure profitability on all its contracts and, at the same time, offer highly competitive prices.

On the shop floor, the company uses the Lantek Wos module to track the progress of each job through the workshop. A networked PC is located next to each production machine, which supplies the operator with CNC code to drive the machine and information about the individual nest of parts. The operator logs start and finish times on the PC, enabling the current manufacturing status to be fed back into Lantek Integra, making it possible for C. Brown to manage its customer schedules, as well as any changes to them, much more effectively. Julian Adkins says, "Now we can provide a specific lead time for each job, rather than a generic one for all our work, as we know the current workload on each machine. Lantek Integra provides the framework which allows Lantek Expert and Lantek Manager to integrate into a transparent and automated system."

Unique in the sheet metal arena, Lantek Integra includes an Outsourcing module which manages subcontracted tasks.

Julian Adkins adds, "We can build subcontract processes into our quotations and fill in the details later, when we have the order. For us this can be processes such as countersinking holes." He continues "Our sales team is reporting a substantial improvement in our on-time deliveries which significantly improves our customer satisfaction levels. Furthermore, we can use Lantek Integra to identify common problems in our manufacturing and service, and take action to prevent their reoccurrence. Overall, it is vital to the growth of our business. It helps us to identify key areas of weakness in our business model, allowing us to develop and test the most effective improvements. It is also a driving force for capital investment as it gives us the ability to find where we are making money and identify the best investment opportunities."