Sud Ouest producing with UniMail system by Realcom

Newspaper Sud Ouest in Bordeaux, France, has brought a 15-year-old mailroom into shape with a UniMail production control from Realcom, the Norwegian software developer. It was clear project planning and a transparent solution that won the day for Realcom. The open UniMail system allows Sud Ouest to extend the mailroom with components from all manufacturers.

The mailroom manager plans production at the central console and allocates the routes to the three lines. Using drag and drop, he can shift production from one line to another.

Control in a mixed-platform environment

Laurent Daudenthun, technical director at Sud Ouest in Bordeaux since 2008, considers himself fortunate. At Realcom, after a long and fruitless search for a mailroom production control, he finally found the very solution he had been looking for. Using standard commercial and comparatively inexpensive hardware, Realcom has realized a simple yet efficient solution for the planning and control of bundle production and its allocation to the loading docks.

Up until a year ago, Realcom was for Sud Ouest an unknown quantity. It was Thomas Doliwa from German engineering company GraphicTeam GmbH, which represents Realcom in France and will soon also in Germany, who drew Laurent Daudenthun's attention to the Norwegian software developer. Laurent Daudenthun wanted to know more about Realcom and its capabilities, and so

sent both his assistant and the mailroom manager to a Swedish newspaper printer that was already working with a UniMail system. The reference could not have been better: the visitors from France were shown what the Realcom system could do in a very heterogeneous mailroom system with components from all major manufacturers.

At the World Publishing Expo 2014 in Amsterdam, Laurent Daudenthun had the chance to speak personally with the Realcom team. The discussion left a lasting impression, and he felt that Realcom understood him straightaway. The engineers' response to every one of his questions was „Yes, we do that!". And he never doubted them, he says.

Clear operator guidance

Sud Ouest has been producing its newspaper on three Müller Martini production

lines for fifteen years. Circulations are currently reaching 280,000 copies, split into 19 editions for a region extending from La Rochelle in the north down to Biarritz in the south. Each production line is equipped with a compensating stacker, inline topsheet printing and cross strapping. Bundles are allocated to the twelve loading docks via a circulating loop.

Realcom has replaced the old control of the three compensating stackers, the topsheet applicator and bundle evacuation with modern ICP modules that have a free programming option. The developers tuned the software on site, working together with the Sud Ouest team and taking their requirements into account while paying special attention to their wishes for the design of the user interface. The exceptional result of the close collaboration is an easy-to-grasp colour concept. The four colours of red

Colour codes make for rapid identification of the different operating conditions for all components in the mailroom system.

(switched off, not active); orange (switched on but not ready for production); green (initialisation, soon ready for production); and white (production running), make for rapid identification of the different operating conditions of all components, and are a major factor contributing to the high level of production security.

Keeping a promise

Replacement of the hardware and the installation of the new planning and control system took just six months. On Laurent Daudenthun's insistence, the changeover was carried out in phases, first one line and then the next. After the changeover on line 1, lines 2 and 3 followed at two week intervals. The Müller Martini controls were retained, not only for the three compensating stackers, but also for the evacuation system. „We always had the option to revert to the old system, all the more so because Realcom adopted the original Müller Martini operating data, and no modifications whatsoever were made to our IT," says Laurent Daudenthun. In hindsight, he thinks his precautionary measures were unnecessary. „From the very first day, the Realcom system functioned perfectly. The Norwegians did a thorough job and kept their promises," he states.

Open and independent

Sud Ouest runs production on each of the three lines at speeds up to 70,000 copies an hour. If one of the compensating stackers malfunctions, then the newspaper products are routed to a buffer and processed later in offline mode. For Laurent Daudenthun it's

not a satisfactory solution, „because as a result we get behind with distribution." For that reason, he is planning to add a second compensating stacker to each of the three lines. In this respect, UniMail makes his life a lot easier, because the Realcom production control is open and supports compensating stackers from all major manufacturers. So Laurent Daudenthun is free to choose, and can shop around for the best offer in the marketplace.

UniMail at a glance

The UniMail-System at Sud Ouest comprises UniStack and UniLoad. On a primary level, the mailroom manager plans production at the central control console. He allocates the routes to the three lines. Using drag

and drop, he can simply shift production along with the associated distribution data from one line to another.

Realcom has installed the production control system on the central server in Sud Ouest's IT department; dedicated server hardware was not required for UniMail. As a result, Sud Ouest is not only saving investment costs; synergies have also been achieved with 24/7 maintenance. Thanks to permanent server-mirroring, data redundancy is always assured. If for any reason the server should fail, the system will immediately switch automatically to the second server, and uninterrupted production will be guaranteed. Because, with UniMail, Realcom controls production on the bundling level, each bundle can be tracked, located and changed.

UniStack controls bundle production and inline topsheet printing. On each line, before being applied to the bundles, the topsheets are printed off two commercial laser printers that are designed for industrial use. On the one hand, the twin printer configuration has a back-up function; the printers are fixed by simple turn-lock fasteners and can be changed over quickly. On the other hand, with two printers per topsheet print run, production of the entire newspaper circulation is assured with paper cassettes being filled just once.

UniLoad guarantees the correct allocation of bundles to the loading docks. One monitor at each dock provides the driver with detailed information about the current status of production with data about routes, the bundles that have been produced, and those that have been transferred for evacuation.

One monitor at each loading dock provides the driver with detailed information about the current route, the number of bundles already and still to be produced, plus the bundles that have reached the loading dock.