

# Distribution company finds more space with creative reorganization

BY LINDA WATER NELSON

Pyramex Safety Products LLC had a space problem, and a Memphis company had the solution. And it didn't involve a move into a bigger facility.

For the past decade the Collierville-based Pyramex, an importer and distributor of safety glasses, had enjoyed a growth rate of about 25% a year, shipping more than 151,000 packages

in 2006. Its facility was simply too small to accommodate any more business. And its outdated shipping system was stretched to the maximum and there was no room for more SKUs.

"We had to reorganize the physical operation and make room for at least five years of additional growth," says Travis Slater, vice president of finance for Pyramex. "At the same time, we could not afford any measurable downtime. Our guarantee is a quick turnaround — often 24

hours — and any new alternative had to keep us operating with only a weekend of downtime for installation and changeover."

Pyramex contacted Integrated Solutions, Inc., in late spring and asked for an answer. Integrated Solutions does design and installation of logistics solutions using a combination of off-the-shelf, semi-custom and custom components for a wide range of companies.

Integrated Solutions' task was to rework space in Pyramex's warehouse to



COURTESY INTEGRATED SOLUTIONS, INC.

**Integrated Solutions installed new conveyer belts in the Pyramex distribution center.**

allow for growth without adding additional room. The company does this by rearranging work areas and installing conveyer belts and other material handling components.

The first step was for Pyramex to provide historical order and shipping information for analysis.

"It took several weeks to digest the information and factor in the need for ways to handle the off-shore container loads, full cartons and broken cases that are all part of Pyramex' normal busi-

ness," says David Cole, operations manager for Integrated Solutions. "We also needed to accommodate outgoing shipments that run from truckloads to small packages."

Any answer had to cut time from the picking/packing process and offer more space for growth, Cole says. In addition, it had to be possible to break down the old hardware and install the new system between a Friday afternoon and a Monday morning.

"In analyzing Pyramex' business his-

tory, we found that, as with most businesses, 15% to 20% of the product SKUs accounted for more than 80% of the orders," Cole says. "We laid out the floor plan to address that. In addition, conveyer systems were designed so that boxes, rather than people, moved when orders were being filled for shipment."

On the installation weekend in November, Pyramex stayed operational with the old system until mid-day Friday. Everything was installed and tested by the following Monday, and Slater says that any bugs in the system were minimal and easy to correct.

"We were fully operational after the weekend installation and our people adapted quickly to the changes in layout that encompassed the entire facility," Slater says. "For the approximately \$100,000 investment, we feel that Pyramex is now positioned to meet our growing market for about five years. During that time, we know that we will also need more off-site warehouse space, but that can wait."

Cole says that small to mid-sized companies are often skittish about an overhaul like the one at Pyramex. They are afraid that they can't afford the downtime, or that a new system won't easily accommodate their specific business. If the input data is accurate, the analysis effective and the installation plan appropriate, that will not be the case. And if the supplier is located near the client, it can make all the difference in the world.

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