Crane Information Kaizen is a Big Win for
Order Management and Graphic Services Teams
A GBMP Client Case Study

Crane & Company is a family-owned business with origins dating back to the 1770's, when Stephen Crane founded the Liberty Paper Mill in Milton, Massachusetts to provide the paper for the currency of the American Revolution. However, it is through Crane's stationery products that most people know the Crane name now. Items from the Crane Stationery Division have been the product of choice for many distinguished individuals, from Queen Elizabeth II to Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. Today's wide variety of personalized and boxed Crane Stationery products are produced at its plant in North Adams, Massachusetts, where Crane has printed its stationery since 1959.

In 2014 GBMP's Dave Wesche began working with Crane's Stationery Division, helping employees to learn and apply lean principles and methods in both production and administrative processes. Under Dave's guidance, a recent information improvement effort in key front end administrative areas has been a big win, thanks to the employees who made it happen.

"Crane's stationery products are highly customized, and they can provide something like a wedding invitation set in a wide variety of styles, colors, typefaces, paper and printing methods. There are literally thousands of unique, customized orders that need to get out the door in any given week. On top of that, they add and remove catalog items throughout the year, and have several seasonal peaks to contend with. All these things create serious challenges to maintaining easy access to up to date information for the busy Order Management and Typesetting teams," according to Dave.

So how did Crane's creative employees use continuous improvement thinking and methods to help with this? Previously a key source of product and process data for the Order Management and Typesetting Teams was a Wiki file that existed on its own dedicated server and most of its data was in an HTML format. This file was supposed to be a primary repository for information used on a daily basis by the Order Management and Typesetting teams. But because the WIKI data was viewed as outdated, cluttered and difficult to search, it was avoided by many potential users. Work-arounds such as notes, binders and asking others for the information were the norm instead.

After thinking about how to improve the situation, the team worked with the internal IT group to cleanse, organize and move the data to a Master Reference folder on a central drive, recreating the HTML data in simple MS Word and PDF formats. In the process of making the move from the Wiki to the central drive, they examined and purged many files, gained many more regular users, and ended up with a more easily searched and modified reference source for their staff. Key source data can now be easily maintained and updated by the departments using it, with occasional external IT (Help Desk) assistance needed only to set access permissions on any new folders created within the Master Reference.

Since the change to the improved central file, 68 new users have taken advantage of the improved reference data. More than 450 files were purged in the initial cleanup process, and the new user-friendly Master Reference System is estimated to save 5-15 minutes per look-up! The improved search capability also means staff can find answers that previously they would have gone to another department to get answered.   Files are correct now, and are easier to access and update.

What are some of the benefits from the point of view of the users?

- From Order Management Associate, Bernadette Armata: "I like it. Information is right at our fingertips – we won't have to waste time searching thru notebooks or emails to find a relevant procedure."

- From Typesetter, Faye Williamson: "The information I was seeking was easier to find than trying to utilize the WIKI. I like having all the info in one location and have created a shortcut to it on my desktop. "

- From Typesetter, Mark Johnson: "Our jobs at Crane require us to remember a large amount of information (different brand guidelines, press restrictions, that sort of thing). It's all-important stuff to know, but there's just too much for any one person to remember. Most of us had at least one giant binder full off notes, memos, etc. The Master Reference folder system will be a lot easier since it's more organized and can be searched by keyword rather than rifling through page after page for a hastily handwritten note from last year which you vaguely remember. Now, since the files are all in either Microsoft Word docs or PDFs, the individual pages themselves are searchable, which should significantly cut down on the amount of time we have to spend looking for key information.

- According to Typesetter, Jenna Racette: "The files we need are controlled by people who work within our departments, so it is easier to update and organize them as needed. Now, if I have a simple Order Management question, I can easily look up the reference material instead of having to interrupt or distract Order Management in the middle of whatever they are doing."

- From Typesetter, Joan Harwood: "It is so much easier to make updates/adjustments to the materials!! And now Customer Service can access lots of information on motifs and monograms that they used to call me for."

For more information about Crane & Company please visit www.crane.com

For more information about GBMP please visit www.gbmp.org