



POLARIS FINDS “THE WAY OUT” WITH ROBOT/SCHEDULE

by Cheryl Lewis

Not many companies can say they manufacture fun, but that’s exactly what Polaris Industries, Inc., does. A leader in the motor-sports industry, Polaris designs, engineers, and manufactures ATVs, snowmobiles, RANGER utility vehicles, and Victory motorcycles. The common denominator for these vehicles is that they let people escape from their busy lives to a world of freedom and fun. Since 1954, when the first Polaris snowmobile made its appearance, Polaris riders have been finding “The Way Out.”

Polaris is headquartered in Medina, Minnesota; with manufacturing facilities in Roseau, Minnesota; Spirit Lake, Iowa; Osceola, Wisconsin; and a distribution facility in Vermillion, South Dakota. Mark Haanpaa, the Lead System Administrator for Polaris, explains a little of their IT history. “In the early 1990s, Polaris brought in an IBM® AS/400™ and installed MAPICS. At about the same time we started using Help/Systems’ Robot products. Today, we’re on the IBM® System i™, running two systems with many partitions—including two production partitions that are replicated. One

system houses our manufacturing Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) Solution, and the other one houses our distribution facility.”

As far as interfacing with other computing environments, Mark notes, “We do some Oracle downloads for our Oracle data warehouse. In addition, our dealer extranet, our intranet, and e-commerce servers access some of our System i data in real time.”

Robot/SCHEDULE®, Help/Systems’ job scheduler and batch management system, was the first Robot product Polaris implemented. When they started using Robot/SCHEDULE, they used it primarily as a placeholder for all of their jobs. Mark explains, “With MAPICS, you have an ERP manufacturing environment that involves lots of Material Resources Planning (MRP) runs and forecasting, taking place weekly. It seemed to us that that kind of setup needed to be manual. Our operators would see the job, plug in a lot of values, and kick off the job manually.”



*Robot/SCHEDULE and the other operations automation products of Help/Systems help Polaris offer their customers an escape into a world of freedom and fun—
"The Way Out."*



more than 400 employees—administering our desktop systems and the more sophisticated equipment on the floors in the manufacturing facility has absorbed several of our former System i operators. We have reduced our System i administration overhead and redeployed our operations support to the desktop and the shop floor without having to increase our head count.”

In addition, errors from manual entries are down now that Polaris has automated their schedule. As Mark points out, “Certainly, there is always some human error when people manually enter values, variables, and so forth. By using Robot/REPLAY and Robot/SCHEDULE, we have been able to be more consistent and not have those errors.”

Both of Mark’s current operators, as well as Mark, had training on Help/Systems’ software before coming to Polaris. After Mark started at Polaris, he took a Robot/SCHEDULE class at Help/Systems. Over the years, he also had the opportunity to use Help/Systems’ Help Desk. “After we upgraded to V5R2, we had an issue with Robot/REPLAY jobs. We worked closely with Help/Systems Technical Support. Good support got the problem fixed.”

When asked what features of Robot/SCHEDULE they use the most, Marks thinks of group jobs, reactive jobs, and override codes. “As things juggle around on the weekends—a manufacturing line is going to be offline—using Robot/SCHEDULE’s Schedule Override

Mark admits they are a bit more savvy with their operations now. “We completely automated those jobs, both on the regular weekly schedule, and ad hoc in the middle of the week. We just select one job to run and, using group and reactive jobs, we run the entire MRP process, taking advantage of the event-driven scheduling available in Robot/SCHEDULE.”

By Mark’s calculation, Polaris has 350 to 400 jobs in Robot/SCHEDULE, including nightly, weekly, and end-of-the-month jobs. How automated does he feel their schedule is? Mark explains, “When I first came to work at Polaris, we had four operators at our manufacturing facility and two operators at our distribution facility. When we upgraded the system to a more robust infrastructure and got some operators more involved with the Robot tools, we eliminated four operators and moved them to a different part of the company. We now run those two systems with just two operators.”

For the last few years, Polaris has been running without a night operator. Mark explains, “We work a schedule from 5:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.; but jobs run around the

clock. Using Robot/SCHEDULE, Robot/REPLAY,[®] Robot/CONSOLE,[®] and Robot/ALERT,[®] we run our jobs and let our programmers know if something is wrong, so they can sign on to the System i and make corrections. If there is a standard solution for an error, we program the solution in Robot/CONSOLE to automate the response.”

Another benefit of automation was the ability to easily page Polaris programmers for problems without involving anybody else. “You don’t like to use your operators or your on-call staff as an answering service for your programmers.” Mark explains, “In the past, a problem would display a message on the QSYSOPR message queue, the operators would see it and call the programmers. Then, the programmers would tell the operators what to do. It was terribly inefficient and a waste of time. Now, with Robot/ALERT and Robot/CONSOLE, we go right to the source of the problem—the code.”

From an IT management perspective, moving operators into different roles is a positive step. Mark explains, “As the company expanded—since 2000, we have added





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Codes to omit and hold jobs is really useful. We use that a lot."

As a publicly traded company, Polaris must deal with the compliance requirements of the Sarbanes-Oxley (SOX) Act, and Robot/SCHEDULE helps with that also. "I am the Sarbanes administrator for the System i and for a lot of the other IT functions," Mark says. "We use Robot/SCHEDULE to run our daily Sarbanes matching report. We run a program that looks for changed objects and produces a report every day at 7:00. We match that against what should have changed based on our programmers' project completion forms. If they don't match, we have to reconcile the differences."

In general, Robot/SCHEDULE has made reporting easier, as Mark explains. "As the auditors come in, define what they want to see and what they want you to audit, I set up Robot/SCHEDULE jobs to handle their requirements. We run a wide range of reports daily or monthly, depending on what the auditors need to see. There's no person running those reports—Robot/SCHEDULE handles them automatically."

As a final note, Mark encourages everyone to visit their Web site, www.polarisindustries.com, to look at the new Polaris products. "We're very proud of our Victory motorcycle. JD Powers recently released their ratings for motorcycle manufacturers and the Victory ranks in the top five in every category listed." It's the latest in a line of products that help Polaris provide an escape into a world of freedom and fun. A line of products that offer "The Way Out", courtesy of Polaris, Help/Systems, and Robot/SCHEDULE.

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