

Modern Metals®

The magazine for metal service centers, fabricators & OEMs/end users

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A TREND Publication **October 2012**



METALS ECONOMIC OUTLOOK 2013



MATERIAL HANDLING

NEW FILLING STATION
INCREASES PRODUCTIVITY,
DECREASES MANPOWER

Bar ordering, bar none

NEW FILLING STATION INCREASES PRODUCTIVITY, DECREASES MANPOWER

BY STEPHANIE ANDREWS

Filling bar orders can be exhausting and dangerous work. Processing orders for next-day delivery requires one or two operators to lift heavy materials, quickly pick orders and send them on their way. Not only is this physically demanding work but also for service centers that have a high volume of orders, this process isn't efficient. Canrack's bar order filling station solves the problem.

For metal service centers, packaging and handling bundles is an essential part of the business. "When you [process an order] manually, the bundles are often not as compact as they should be, and the ends are not exactly square," says Robert Howard, president of Canrack Metal Center Systems, Mississauga, Ontario. "[Canrack's] bar order filling station produces a very tight bundle. We have a squaring plate that al-

lows the operators to square the ends, so the bundle is square at both sides."

With more compact bundles there is significantly less risk of the straps coming loose during transport. And less human handling of the materials means fewer damages. "The operator really doesn't touch the material, so the elimination of scratches and nicks and dents is because of our machine," states Howard. "So the



The bar order process is a two-person operation: One person runs the system while the other picks the items from the racks.



quality is improved to our customers as well." This improved quality was exactly what Ryerson's Wilmington, Del., facility was looking for when the company chose Canrack's bar order filling station.

"[We] had used Canrack in other Ryerson operations with great success," says Thomas Becka, general manager of Ryerson Wilmington. "Their ability to match their engineering capabilities with our need to efficiently meet quick customer turnaround has helped us meet customer requirements in a cost-effective manner."

Because Ryerson Wilmington is filling 200 to 300 line items a night, this system is ideal for its order volume. "Generally, we say that 60 orders a day is a point at which you start looking at the use and justification of a bar station," says Howard. "We have bar stations that are capable of doing 160 orders a day with one person at the station and two people feeding material to the station. This gives a justification of less than two years."

The bar order process begins with the materials being pulled from the racks and delivered to the center where they are



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ROBERT HOWARD, CANRACK METAL CENTER SYSTEMS

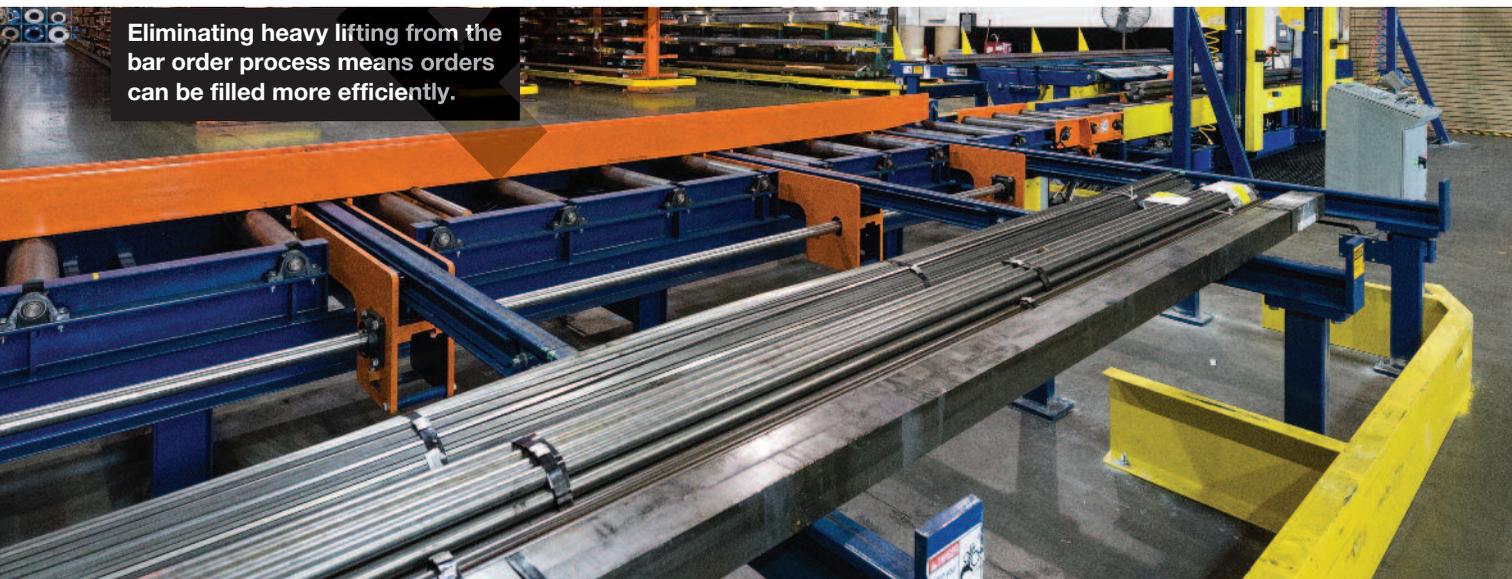
placed on an accumulation conveyor. Then the operator moves the orders into a set of slings, weighing and packaging the order to move to a finished goods accumulation area for offloading. Currently, this is a two-person operation; one person runs the system while the other person picks the items from the racks. With this filling station, Ryerson Wilmington can complete an order in about four minutes. “The system is capable,

with the one person running it, to fill 120 line items in one 8-hour shift,” says Becka.

Less manpower

When Canrack realized all the lifting involved in bar ordering, the company set out to develop a filling station that would eliminate the need for heavy lifting and speed up the ordering process. Because this bar order filling station takes on the responsibilities

Eliminating heavy lifting from the bar order process means orders can be filled more efficiently.



Because operators rarely handle the materials, the bar order filling station minimizes damages.



that would typically befall a worker who fills orders manually, the payoff is infinite. “Certainly from the productivity standpoint, the manpower required is half or better than doing it manually,” says Howard.

Prior to installing the bar order filling station, Ryerson Wilmington had a more labor-intensive approach. “The old way [consisted of] a two- to four-man team pulling items. We used tables and horses, so you are lifting a lot and hand stacking the bundles,” says Becka.

Since getting the new station, he says things are much simpler. “It’s very easy physically on the person running it. Basically they don’t lift anything; it’s all done mechanically.” Because the system creates a tighter bundle, it’s easier to load on the trucks; there is virtually no lifting involved for the employees. This improved employee safety has reduced the chances of at-work fatigue, which can lead to strains and overexertion.

Although Becka mentions there was a learning curve with the product, the employees are happy. “We have already seen a change in [the employees’] attitudes as they can stage orders ahead of time and they are able to effectively make use of material handling equipment in the bar area for other material requirements.”

Quicker delivery

It also is essential for metal service centers to make next-day deliveries, and companies

have a cutoff time for when orders can be delivered next day. Having a bar order filling station in-house means the productivity and efficiency of fulfilling orders has increased exponentially. “Because these stations are fast, the cut-off time can be increased to 4:00 or 5:00 p.m.,” says Howard. “It varies between companies, but you can accept orders later in the day and still make next-day shipment. So [Ryerson’s] service factor to their customer is greatly increased.”

“You want [to take orders] later because it’s so efficient,” says Becka. “We cut off around 5:30 or 6:00 p.m. for orders, and you don’t turn the machine on until you have accumulated your orders for the day.” This filling station allows Ryerson Wilmington quicker turnaround of orders, which increases inventory flow and reduces inventory carrying charges, ultimately creating savings for the company.

While Ryerson Wilmington was transitioning over to Canrack’s filling station, the company still made fulfilling orders a top priority. Even before the installation process had begun, it staffed its bar bay with three personnel to focus on customer commitment. After being trained by Canrack, employees were able to fill in on any shift effectively. They also were able to train multiple employees on the machine in a short amount of time. “This system was so efficient, they literally turned it on and we started using it,” says Becka. “The initial learning curve was

about four hours, and it’s so easy to run that now it’s just developing your own internal techniques.”

Now that Ryerson Wilmington has a more efficient order processing system, the company plans to increase throughput and grow its long product sales for new and existing customers.

“In addition to the bar station, we also added one of the largest saws in the Mid-Atlantic, which now gives us the capability to cut up to 28-inch diameter bars,” says Becka. “We also expanded our footprint by adding 50,000 square feet to help fuel our growth initiative in long products in our trade area. This packaging station gives us the capacity and flexibility to offer short lead times and we are able to offer next-day service to a large portion of the geography we serve.”

For Canrack, knowing the bar order filling station helps Ryerson Wilmington is proof these systems work. “In our opinion, the important thing is that it gives Ryerson a better service factor and better quality to their customer, which increases their business,” says Howard. “I think that’s the major contribution [of] these stations.” ■

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