with delays cropping up in the processing of orders. Now with iPads or PCs, shipping personnel—including forklift operators—can gain access to orders at the mill using BCD’s Nexus Portal, which handles Seneca’s Web-application intranet traffic, and print them out locally.

iPad access to back-end systems has come in handy in other aspects of the company as well. For example, truck loaders formerly had to hand draw diagrams of how lumber units would be positioned on customer trucks. Now they can do that on their iPads to help with the staging and loading of the trucks.

**EVERY MINUTE COUNTS**

Seneca’s customers and suppliers can also take advantage of this type of technology. Previously, when trucks came to the mill gates, they would have to be manually signed in with paper and pencil. Now, the truck drivers check themselves in using a kiosk that asks for basic information such as their name, the company they work for, their order number and which order they’ve come for,” Crouse says. “We can then begin prepping the order before the truck reaches the shipping point.”

An additional bonus to this system is that salespeople now know when trucks have arrived and which orders are about to be filled. This has come in handy when customers call. The salespeople can give the customer real-time information about where their orders are in the loading process and, depending on where the orders stand, make any necessary changes.

Incoming log haulers also use kiosks to check in, but they use bar codes—created using T.L. Ashford’s Barcode 400—printed on weatherproof paper. When they unload their trucks and leave the mill, they simply wave the bar codes at a reader indicating who they are and what time they left. The ticket is then closed.

If trucks will be coming to the mill several times a day, they can use what Hall calls a “day pass” that has a bar code indicating they’re back with additional loads. Instead of rekeying all of their order information each time the driver returns, they simply wave the bar code at the kiosk and drive through. “This helps us make sure they’re in and out ASAP, and when you’re talking 300 or so trucks coming in on a single day, every minute counts.

**You don’t want a backup of 10 trucks,** Hall says.

In the past when trucks arrived, Seneca mill personnel would have to draw images of legally required brands—like those used on cattle, Hall notes—stamped into the logs based on who and where it came from onto a “dump sheet.” These sheets would then be sent to the accounting department the next morning. Now, the equipment operators can sketch the drawings of brands on their iPads. The sketches are then electronically attached to the appropriate load manifest. Office users and managers also have immediate access to such load information so they, too, can monitor related activity.

**MAKING IT POSSIBLE**

Sure, the lumber industry still adheres to some well-worn clichés, but that doesn’t mean it can’t embrace technology as a means to improve efficiencies—and Seneca is an example of that. The team of employees who uses this technology may not be carrying chain saws, but they, as with everyone who works at Seneca, are constantly looking for new and innovative ways to improve the company’s bottom line.

**ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE**

Headquartered in Eugene, Ore., Seneca has grown since its inception in 1954, when it consisted of a single sawmill operation. It now has four mills—three in Eugene and one in Noti, Ore.—and a multicompany structure that includes Seneca Sustainable Energy, a division that manages renewable energy generation from Seneca Sawmill and Seneca Noti, the largest one-site mills in the U.S. Seneca Sawmill and Seneca Noti sit at the core of the four-company model, processing trees that are either grown by Seneca Jones Timber or purchased from third parties. Seneca Sustainable Energy is what sets the company apart from its competitors, repurposing nearly 100 percent of the byproducts created in the lumber-manufacturing process.

“You might think that our mills would be dirty places, but they’re not. Everything is gathered and used. For example, we sell some of the bark, chips, sawdust and shavings that come out of the mills. We also use some of it—the bark, in particular—as fuel to create steam for our dry kilns for lumber that needs to be dried. Within that process, we also create renewable energy that we then sell back to a local electric company,” Crouse says.
Seneca Sawmill Company uses advanced technology—from its front gate to the back office—to sustainably process lumber. Photos (from left to right) show a progression from the harvest of mature trees, through debarking and sorting, to stacking and packaging.

Seneca Programmer/Analyst Steve Hall says that the burning of those byproducts and the energy it generates could supply electricity to 13,000 homes annually. “We’re very sustainable,” he adds. It’s partly why the company is still thriving, despite the recession, while many of its like-sized competitors have gone out of business. Another factor that has supported its survival and growth is the company’s judicious use of technology throughout its operations, including the use of lasers to create straight and very accurate cuts within the sawmills.

That reliance on technology also applies to day-to-day office operations. Because the office only has an IT staff of two—Crouse and Hall—it must run lean and mean and, as Crouse puts it, “do more with less.” That’s in large part why the company is using IBM Power Systems® technology running IBM i as its core computing environment. Hall notes the ease of use and availability of the platform as a boon to small IT departments such as Seneca’s. “We don’t have to do a lot to maintain it,” he says.

User-Friendly and Functional

Although Seneca’s mill operations are supported by other non-IBM platforms, nearly every facet of Seneca’s office workload is hosted on the Power Systems platform, which currently includes an IBM Power® 720 Express system and a soon-to-be-retired IBM System i® 270.

“The IBM systems handle the usual office transactions, such as orders, financials, accounts payable and receivable, and reporting, but we’ve undertaken an effort to extend the capabilities of our RPG applications to other parts of the mill, to supervisors right on the floor,” Crouse says.

The difficult part about this, however, was putting a user-friendly and functional face on green-screen applications, which many contemporary application users often have difficulty navigating. One of the first steps the company took in this direction was using BCD’s Presto to overlay a graphical interface on a human resources application.

“A lot of younger people don’t understand why they should have to use function keys. They’re used to a point-and-click environment,” Crouse notes. “Now, with Presto, HR personnel and supervisors have no idea they’re still accessing the same old programs they had in the past. The only difference is that they can now use a mouse.”

The next such rollout involved a reporting system. Using BCD’s WebSmart ILE and Clover, Crouse and Hall developed several internal Web applications that allowed mill supervisors to input statistical information for morning reports via a Web browser. This eliminated the need for the supervisors to write the information on paper, have someone key it into the system, and then have the reports either printed out or scanned and emailed to the appropriate people.

Those so-called “morning reports,” which often didn’t get to the intended recipients until 3 p.m., are now actually available in the morning, thanks to the company’s use of BCD’s Clover and Catapult products. Clover reports display in a browser, and Catapult allows users to create rules that automatically route IBM spooled reports via email to specified personnel as soon as the submit button is pressed.

Following the success of those projects, Crouse and Hall were asked to assist with reducing the paperwork and increasing efficiency in some of the mill operations. For example, shipping personnel used to drive golf carts from the mill to the office to pick up order information. Although a nice diversion for the shipping personnel, driving golf carts back and forth was inefficient,
UP CLOSE

Customer: Seneca Sawmill Company
Headquarters: Eugene, Ore.
Business: Sustainable timber processing
Challenge: Automating many manual and time-consuming processes
Solution: Using several Business Computer Design (BCD) tools to extend its RPG applications across its operations
Hardware: An IBM Power 720 Express and IBM System i 270
Software: BCD’s Presto, WebSmart ILE, Clover, Catapult and Nexus Portal; and Barcode400 from T.L. Ashford

Seneca Sawmill Company uses advanced technology—from its front gate to the back office—to sustainably process lumber. Photos (from left to right) show a progression from the harvest of mature trees, through debarking and sorting, to stacking and packaging.

Seneca Programmer/Analyst Steve Hall says that the burning of those byproducts and the energy it generates could supply electricity to 13,000 homes annually. “We’re very sustainable,” he adds.

It’s partly why the company is still thriving, despite the recession, while many of its like-sized competitors have gone out of business. Another factor that has supported its survival and growth is the company’s judicious use of technology throughout its operations, including the use of lasers to create straight and very accurate cuts within the sawmills.

That reliance on technology also applies to day-to-day office operations. Because the office only has an IT staff of two—Crouse and Hall—it must run lean and mean and, as Crouse puts it, “do more with less.” That’s in large part why the company is using IBM Power Systems* technology running IBM i as its core computing environment. Hall notes the ease of use and availability of the platform as a boon to small IT departments such as Seneca’s. “We don’t have to do a lot to maintain it,” he says.

USER-FRIENDLY AND FUNCTIONAL

Although Seneca’s mill operations are supported by other non-IBM platforms, nearly every facet of Seneca’s office workload is hosted on the Power Systems platform, which currently includes an IBM Power* 720 Express system and a soon-to-be-retired IBM System i* 270.

“The IBM systems handle the usual office transactions, such as orders, financials, accounts payable and receivable, and reporting, but we’ve undertaken an effort to extend the capabilities of our RPG applications to other parts of the mill, to supervisors right on the floor,” Crouse says.

The difficult part about this, however, was putting a user-friendly and functional face on green-screen applications, which many contemporary application users often have difficulty navigating. One of the first steps the company took in this direction was using BCD’s Presto to overlay a graphical interface on a human resources application.

“A lot of younger people don’t understand why they should have to use function keys. They’re used to a point-and-click environment,” Crouse notes.

Now, with Presto, HR personnel and supervisors have no idea they’re still accessing the same old programs they had in the past. The only difference is that they can now use a mouse.” The next such rollout involved a reporting system. Using BCD’s

Seneca repurposes nearly 100% of the byproducts created in the lumber-manufacturing process.

MARJORIE CROUSE, PROGRAMMER/ANALYST WITH SENeca

Seneca repurposes nearly 100% of the byproducts created in the lumber-manufacturing process.
with delays cropping up in the processing of orders. Now with iPads or PCs, shipping personnel—including forklift operators—can gain access to orders at the mill using BCD’s Nexus Portal, which handles Seneca’s Web-application intranet traffic, and print them out locally. iPad access to back-end systems has come in handy in other aspects of the company as well. For example, truck loaders formerly had to hand draw diagrams of how lumber units would be positioned on customer trucks. Now they can do that on their iPads to help with the staging and loading of the trucks.

**EVERY MINUTE COUNTS**

Seneca’s customer and suppliers can also take advantage of this type of technology. Previously, when trucks came to the mill gates, they would have to be manually signed in with paper and pencil. Now, the truck drivers can take advantage of this technology for more than 20 years. Systems Magazine is available nearly everywhere on our properties.”

Crouse, programmer/analyst with Seneca. “Now, though, GUI and Web-based access to our RPG systems is available nearly everywhere on our properties.”

**ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE**

Headquartered in Eugene, Ore., Seneca has grown since its inception in 1954, when it consisted of a single sawmill operation. It now has four mills—three in Eugene and one in Noti, Ore.—and a multicompany structure that includes Seneca Sustainable Energy. Seneca Sustainable Energy is what sets the company apart from its competitors, repurposing nearly 100 percent of the byproducts created in the lumber-manufacturing process. “You might think that our mills would be dirty places, but they’re not. Everything is gathered and used. For example, we sell some of the bark, chips, sawdust and shavings that come out of the mills. We also use some of it—the bark, in particular—as fuel to create steam for our dry kilns for lumber that needs to be dried.”

Within that process, we also create renewable energy that we then sell back to a local electric company,” Crouse says.