

Customer Success Story: Astro Lighting

Learn how Astro Lighting in 6 months redefined their core product development processes through Cloud-based PLM

Summary

Astro Lighting was a company drowning in data. Adding over 200 new products per year, all with detailed specifications, controlling the new product development process was becoming more and more of a challenge. Astro has now tackled the multitude of documents and spreadsheets with Fusion Lifecycle using a single, real-time dashboard that enables greater control and visibility than ever before.

Accessing process and product information for management reporting is now instantaneous giving Astro's management the ability to allocate development resources more effectively.

Challenges

As a fast-growing company, Astro introduces over 200 new products a year. With a growing product line, maintaining all the data for each product was becoming difficult and time-consuming. "Our product specifications were held in a variety of places including an Access® database, Word® documents, and Excel® spreadsheets," said Stuart Wells, Head of Product Development. "Our distributors need a lot of technical information when quoting a new job. We had to manually collate the information from various sources into a spreadsheet to give to our distributors. This process was very difficult and time-consuming."

At the time, Wells was responsible for the introduction of new products, from concept to completion. "We recognized that there must be a better way to store and access our data. In addition, I had created a giant spreadsheet to help control the critical path for the entire new product development process. Unfortunately, this was cumbersome to use and maintain."

Search for a New System

Driven by the company's new CEO, Wells started looking for software to address the issues Astro was facing with organizing large amounts of product data.

"Initially, we started looking for an ERP system with the idea of building critical path and workflow functionality. Early on in our search, we quickly realized that there wasn't an ERP solution that addressed our needs. As a result, we widened our scope and started exploring other solutions."

At the time, Astro was working with an IT consultant who recommended they evaluate Autodesk's PLM software, Fusion Lifecycle. "We sat down with Autodesk and explained our requirements. The subsequent demonstration showed us that Fusion Lifecycle was exactly what we were looking for. Furthermore, it included other capabilities that we hadn't considered could be included as part of the system, such as revision control." said Wells.



Astro Lighting's Azumi family LED reader interior wall-light in bronze plating.

astro

Industry:

Electrical/Electronic Manufacturing

Products:

Residential Interior & External Lighting

Employees:

83

Number of Locations:

1 United Kingdom, 1 Singapore, 1 United States

Headquarters:

Harlow, United Kingdom

"Before Fusion Lifecycle, we would spend a couple of days running around to gather information needed, now it's instantaneous."

STUART WELLS,
HEAD OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

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Formalizing the new product introduction process was a key requirement for Astro. “We have 8 engineers working on over 200 new products a year,” said Wells. “We had a workflow, but it was held entirely in the minds of our engineers. Nothing was formalized or mapped out. We knew what needed to be done to move a product from A to B, but it was easy to overlook a crucial step. Also, for new employees it was important to have a workflow that they could understand and follow. Fusion Lifecycle provides a graphical representation of the new product introduction process, promoting a faster understanding of the duties of both the individual and team.”

“After a couple of meetings with Autodesk, it became clear that Fusion Lifecycle was the right product for Astro,” said Wells. “We could see that Fusion Lifecycle would improve our business in three key areas. First, improve the data capture and store our information in a single repository. Second, formalize our workflows. Third, introduce revision control.”

Implementation

Astro started implementing Fusion Lifecycle during October 2014 with 12 users. Today, there are 31 users across a wide range of disciplines. “We worked very closely with our Autodesk Consultant and dedicated two days a week to the implementation,” said Wells. “We mapped out and refined our existing processes before creating workflows in Fusion Lifecycle. Over the course of the implementation, we began to realize the power of the software. As we forge ahead, we are still discovering additional capabilities.”

“The next stage was to introduce the software to the main users. We started with our graphics and product development teams. We conducted some introductory sessions showing the scope and power of Fusion Lifecycle. From that point, we started with specific users walking them through a live project from start to finish. In addition to the training, it also allowed testing to ensure every aspect was covered.”

Astro recognized the part Autodesk played during the implementation. “Our Autodesk consultant was critical to our success,” said Wells. “Her knowledge and enthusiasm was second to none. Autodesk challenged us to rethink some of our processes. We are always making changes and improving our processes. It’s a never ending process with great results.”

Benefits of Cloud-based Software

Since implementing Fusion Lifecycle, Astro has enjoyed many benefits. Originally, selecting Cloud-based software was not a major consideration. “When we started looking at ERP solutions, we were looking at the client/server model with the software residing on-site. The fact that Fusion Lifecycle is Cloud-based turned out to be an added bonus. It has been a revelation in the way we use the system. I travel a lot and I can use my Smartphone and tablet to access our data anywhere in the world with an Internet connection. We are confident that our data is secure and backed up continuously. We no longer have to worry about problems with corrupt data,” said Wells.

Astro started their implementation with 12 users, but quickly found value and grew it to over 30 users across multiple departments.



Astro Lighting's Parma 160 LED Wall Sconce is a versatile fixture, suitable for many modern residential and commercial spaces.

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The ease of access to the vast amount of data stored in Fusion Lifecycle has proved to be a major improvement. Wells recalls an incident not long after implementation. “One of our customers asked about a component used in one of our products. The design engineer didn’t have much information to work with. However, with Fusion Lifecycle, it was very easy to find the document he was looking for. Before Fusion Lifecycle, it would have been impossible to find the information without knowing the product the component was used on.”

At the heart of the system are the workflows for new product introduction. “We use workflows extensively throughout the organization,” said Wells. “Our new product introduction is covered by a master workflow that spawns sub-workflows spanning 10 major milestones. By formalizing the process in Fusion Lifecycle, we can be sure that no tasks are overlooked. Before an engineer releases a new product, they go through a checklist of around 200 questions. The workflow ensures that the new product has been reviewed by all the relevant people. Prior to Fusion Lifecycle, we didn’t have the detailed level of task identification and approval process.”

Fusion Lifecycle provides Astro with the visibility they were lacking as well as helping Wells manage his department more efficiently. “Fusion Lifecycle’s dashboard provides me with a quick overview of the workload in my department. I can easily see which engineers are working on what products. With Fusion Lifecycle, I can drill down into the detail of each workflow. I have a much clearer picture of the current status of a product in the development process, helping to quickly identify and resolve potential bottlenecks. Fusion Lifecycle makes it easier to allocate a new product to the right engineer. I can make sure that senior engineers are working on the more complicated products.”

Another area where Fusion Lifecycle has proved to be a time-saver is management reporting. “Every time there is a board meeting we provide information regarding the status of the new products in development,” said Wells. “Before Fusion Lifecycle, we would spend a couple of days running around to gather the information, now it’s instantaneous.”

Fusion Lifecycle has helped Astro’s design engineers increase productivity. “Our design engineers typically work on multiple products at the same time. In addition, there are a lot of interruptions with support calls. One minute an engineer is working on a design, the next talking to a customer. Fusion Lifecycle helps engineers manage many different tasks during the day. Because of Fusion Lifecycle, the process is formalized and engineers don’t have to rely on their memory exclusively. We are now developing the same number of products, but the products today are far more complicated and sophisticated. Without Fusion Lifecycle it would have been difficult to keep up with demand without increasing staff,” said Wells.

A key factor for Astro was the fact that Fusion Lifecycle is not only easy to use, but also easy to maintain. Wells explained:

“Fusion Lifecycle is very flexible and you can mold the software to fit your business. I perform the role of software administrator, and as such it was important that we could maintain the software ourselves. We didn’t want to have to contact Autodesk and explain our requirements every time we wanted to change the software. What I really like about Fusion Lifecycle is that we can very quickly add steps to workflows, and add new fields as required. It has allowed us to build and maintain our system in-house. It’s a testament to just how easy the software is to use.”

“Fusion Lifecycle has revolutionized the way I interact with our product data. Now even when I’m traveling I can access data and approve changes from my Smartphone or tablet from anywhere.”

STUART WELLS,
HEAD OF PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT



Astro Lighting's Joel family of wall, table, and floor lamps in a variety of finishes.

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Future Plans

According to Wells, Astro has plans to expand Fusion Lifecycle's use throughout its supply chain. "We design our products in the UK and manufacture in China. We work with selected partners to manufacture our products, and we want to get them more involved with Fusion Lifecycle. For example, we want the factories to enter their quotes directly in to Fusion Lifecycle instead of sending them to an engineer. This not only will save time, but will also automatically notify the engineer when a quote is ready for review. In the future, we want to introduce Fusion Lifecycle in our quality control process."

About Astro Lighting

Founded in 1997, Astro Lighting is a leading British designer and producer of contemporary lighting supplied predominantly to architects, designers, and specifiers. The company has grown on average 20 percent year-on-year thanks to its insistence on only the highest levels of design, quality, and customer service. Today Astro exports to over 70 countries. With newly established Asian and US subsidiaries, the company is strengthening its position as a global brand.

Learn more at www.astrolighting.com

About Autodesk

Autodesk's product innovation platform brings together a set of connected design, manufacturing, and IoT tools in a single data-centered solution. This cloud-based platform, Fusion, supports the new ways that products are designed, made, and used while giving you access to tools for the top manufacturing trends.

Learn more at www.autodeskfusionlifecycle.com

Key Takeaways:

- With over 200 new products added every year, Astro needed a system to unify their product data and processes.
- A highly manual quotation process required collating different data sources leading to a long lead time for every quote.
- No formalized or mapped workflows lead to large variations in Astro's NPI processes, which resulted in low management visibility and overlooked steps.
- Taking a methodical approach, Astro mapped out their engineering and business process before creating workflows in Fusion Lifecycle.
- Astro continuously discovered new ways to improve their workflows through partnering closely with Autodesk Consulting.
- Astro values the benefits of anywhere/anytime access to Cloud PLM
- Fusion Lifecycle has helped transform engineering efficiency and documentation
- Next steps for Astro include extending the use of Fusion Lifecycle through its supply chain and quality control processes.