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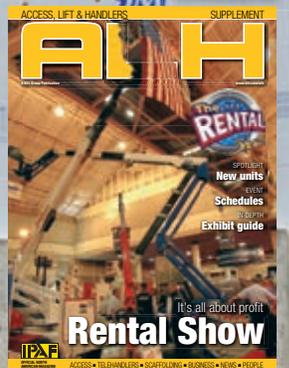
TOPLIST
MastClimber20

PREVIEWS
WoC
Bauma

INSIDE

ACCESS, LIFT & HANDLERS   SUPPLEMENT

ALH

The RENTAL

SPOTLIGHT
New units
EVENT
Schedules
IN DEPTH
Exhibit guide

It's all about profit
Rental Show

IPAF

ACCESS ■ TELEHANDLERS ■ SCAFFOLDING ■ BUSINESS ■ NEWS ■ PEOPLE

Rental Show
supplement

SKYJACK

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Telehandlers

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'Smart' systems

Technology company SmartEquip has grown substantially since its inception in 2000.

Lindsey Anderson **discusses business and benefits with CEO** Alex Schuessler**.**

In 2008, Murray Pollok, then-editor of *International Rental News*, sat down with SmartEquip's CEO, Alex Schuessler, to discuss the company's vision and outlook. Schuessler's company was 8-years-old at the time and its biggest challenge was selling "another piece of software" to not only OEMs, but also rental companies. On top of that challenge, SmartEquip also was trying to focus its sightline on penetrating the European market, which was closely watching the U.S.-based company and its deals with Sunbelt Rentals, JLG, Manitou, Genie and more.

Fast forward eight years and SmartEquip

SmartEquip's CEO, Alex Schuessler

has not only secured business within Europe (Netherlands-based equipment rental company Boels joined the SmartEquip Network in 2013), but it has roughly 75 percent of the top-20 rental companies in North America on board using its systems, including United Rentals, Sunbelt Rentals, BlueLine, Hertz Equipment Rentals and many more. The company has more than 40,000 users across more than 4,000 locations in North America and Europe.

"We have 160 brands overall," Schuessler tells ALH. "We are currently processing approximately 100,000 orders per month at a value of approximately $40,000,000."

As previously mentioned, SmartEquip has a number of OEMs participating in its program, including: Caterpillar, Easy Lift (Europe-only), Gehl, Genie, Gradall, Hy-Brid Lifts, JCB, JLG, Lull, Manitou and Skyjack. SmartEquip also has large contractor fleets such as Oldcastle (CRH) and Kiewit. A number of Cat Rental Stores (such as Puckett Rents) and smaller or independent rental companies have joined, as well (Cresco Equipment Rentals, Randall Rents, Cooper Equipment Rentals, PDQ Rentals and Neff Rentals. See the box story for more.)

SmartEquip's main focus used to surround parts ordering and procurement. The main aim of the company's system was to give rental companies a single web portal to identify and order parts and any other aftermarket items, such as manuals and safety bulletins, from their suppliers.

The company has now matured into an online fleet support network that connects fleet owners to manufacturers and their dealers with real-time access to critical parts and service information; helps fleet owners generate more profit from their equipment by automating and accelerating the service workflow, increasing asset availability and revenue; streamlines the service process, eliminates order errors,

improves technician wrench-time and reduces equipment downtime.

One-stop shop

Fleet maintenance and repairs can often freeze an asset in its tracks. SmartEquip aims to streamline parts management issues, which directly impact "wrench time" for a mechanic.

According to a study by the company, nearly 50 percent of service technician "wrench time" is anything but – mechanics waste time searching for manuals, identifying the correct parts to order, evaluating parts inventory, ordering parts and manually updating work orders. And then, errors and downtime can still happen (roughly 47 minutes of administration time is used per parts request, which there are roughly 2,000 of a year. Nearly 350 parts are ordered with errors and only 50 percent of mis-ordered parts are returned. All of this causes delays and downtime – which means wasted money.

"Mechanics spend two-thirds of their hours looking up part numbers," Schuessler says. "We think their time could be put to better use."

On top of saving money and time with the reduction of services and repair costs, corporate overhead costs can be slimmed and trimmed due to a reduction in accounts payable costs and vendor data management costs. ("OEMs spend tons of time on updating databases," Schuessler says.) Overall, there will be an improvement in revenue and turnover for companies using SmartEquip's solutions. The reduced downtime increases equipment availability and results in a higher yield on assets.

There are a number of ways to save using the system – the basic installation is only one piece of the puzzle. SmartEquip can add on benefits such as the ability to have smaller and smarter parts inventories; modules to cover warranties; preventative maintenance; telematics and more.

The company also has partnered with a number of software providers, with the likes of Texada Software, Wynne Systems, Genisys Software and Point of Rental.

"Through technology development, we are now able to bring the costs down to provide return-on-investment to small and mid-market sized companies," Schuessler says. "For example, Point of Rental offers applications as an integrated extension of their business platform."

The partnership, announced in early 2015, allows the two companies to integrate their respective software platforms.

This integration enables Point-of-Rental users to receive real time, accurate parts and service support for more than 160 brands of equipment currently on the SmartEquip network, while automating electronic parts ordering from both manufacturers and their dealers.

The partnership will give users a significant reduction in equipment operating costs, while increasing fleet financial utilization and rental revenue.

Participating users can receive self-updating parts, service and repair information dynamically customized down to the individual asset number for equipment in their fleets.

With SmartEquip's network integrated into the powerful and robust software, purchase orders and work orders are automatically and accurately populated.

What's next?

Eight years ago, one of SmartEquip's biggest goals was bringing in business from Europe. The company succeeded with Boels, who went live on the network in 2014. It's been more than a year since Boels joined, and SmartEquip now processes orders for approximately 100 of the company's suppliers.

"By the beginning of this year, we expect to approach 5,000 orders per month across several hundred [of Boels'] locations," Schuessler says. "Boels is a remarkably progressive company and has served as our "showroom" for the

SmartEquip grows substantially

The SmartEquip online fleet support network expanded in 2015 with a number of new agreements.

Caterpillar Rental Store operation **Cresco Equipment Rentals**, and aerial lift equipment rental companies **Randall Industries** and **Randall Rents** joined.

Cresco, which is a division of Peterson Cat, operates 19 locations in northern California. SmartEquip said its technology would be used to automate Cresco's service process, increase technician productivity, eliminate parts order errors and improve uptime and availability of the company's vast and growing rental fleet.

At Cresco, SmartEquip said it would use its own technology with Wynne Systems' RentalMan software to allow Cresco to automate the workflow for parts and service, and leverage integrations with the manufacturers on its network.

Cresco general manager for product support Tyler Hardy said the company was committed to providing technology that would make its staff as productive and efficient as possible.

"SmartEquip technology will enable Cresco to re-engineer our internal work flow, and to eliminate over half of the steps in our current repair and maintenance process, not only reducing costs, but also improving productivity of both technicians and parts administrators," Hardy said. "In addition, we believe that using SmartEquip technology to compress repair times will result in improved fleet availability for our customers and revenues for Cresco."

Meanwhile, Chicago-based Randall Industries and Florida-based Randall Rents also entered into an agreement to join the SmartEquip network using the company's Enterprise Fleet application.

Ryan Gough, general manager of Randall Industries, said, "We are excited about taking this next step with SmartEquip to improve our service to customers, by increasing visibility, adding speed and efficiency, and standardizing our systems and processes across our rental locations."

Ron Piccolo, SmartEquip senior vice president of sales and marketing, said, "By connecting fleet owners to their manufacturers and respective dealers, SmartEquip significantly decreases costs for all participants while improving fleet performance, which ultimately grows profitability."

Toronto-based **Cooper Equipment Rentals** entered an agreement to access the SmartEquip network. By utilizing SmartEquip's Enterprise application in conjunction with **Texada Software's** Systematic Rental Management software, Cooper Equipment Rentals will be able to "streamline their service process, eliminate parts order errors and increase their rental fleet's utilization," the company said in a statement. "The integration of the SmartEquip and Systematic Rental Management will allow Cooper to leverage the combined platform to enhance their existing business relationships with the 160 parts and MRO suppliers on the SmartEquip Network."

Doug Dougherty, president of Cooper Equipment Rentals said, "We are excited about taking this next step with SmartEquip and Texada to improve our service to customers by increasing visibility, adding speed and efficiency, and standardizing our systems and processes across an expanding network of rental locations in Ontario."

"Texada Software has been a partner with Cooper Equipment Rentals since 1991 and we are very excited to help facilitate the relationship with SmartEquip and Cooper," said Alex Kress, general manager of operations for Texada. "We look forward to providing the same level of service to all of our users."

PDQ Rentals, based in Santa Fe Springs, CA, was one of the first **Point-of-Rental** customers to join the SmartEquip network. The agreement allows PDQ to use SmartEquip's Enterprise application in conjunction with their existing rental management software by Point-of-Rental to streamline processes such as parts orders and fleet utilization.

"We have watched the development of the SmartEquip Network over several years and are very excited to be one of the first Point-of-Rental customers to sign with SmartEquip," said Todd Turner, PDQ Rentals' vice president. "We look forward to leveraging the SmartEquip Network to reduce order errors, increase mechanic wrench time and improve our fleet's uptime and utilization."

"We are pleased to welcome PDQ Rentals to our rapidly expanding mid market customer base," added Fernando Pinera, SmartEquip's COO. "We firmly believe the efficiencies that SmartEquip delivers are not just for large contractors or national rental fleets. All fleets benefit greatly from our Network's ability to reduce the manual processes and errors that create inefficiencies."

European rental industry. We expect to add several European rental companies in the first half of next year, including some high-reach equipment specialists."

The company also aims to continue its international expansion through Europe and its growth in the mid-market sector of North America. They aim to also expand in the contractor and waste-management markets, as well as continued development of mobile technology. But, the biggest picture to be seen is SmartEquip's vision to provide its customers and users with nearly everything they need at any given time.

"We want to support anything with serialized assets," Schuessler says. "We will be investing heavily and expect huge growth for the years to come."