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Pallet Track® Solves Critical Data Challenges for Tree Brand Packaging



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56102	56113	Nov 9 2020	Customer ABC	123 Main Street	5612	
56102	56114	Nov 9 2020	Customer B	888 Royal Rd, Charlotte, NC 28226	5612	
56102	56120	Nov 6 2020	Customer C	122 McFadden Rd., Charlotte, NC 28208	5612	
56102	56121	Nov 6 2020	Customer D	333 Anytown St, Charlotte, NC 28208	5612	

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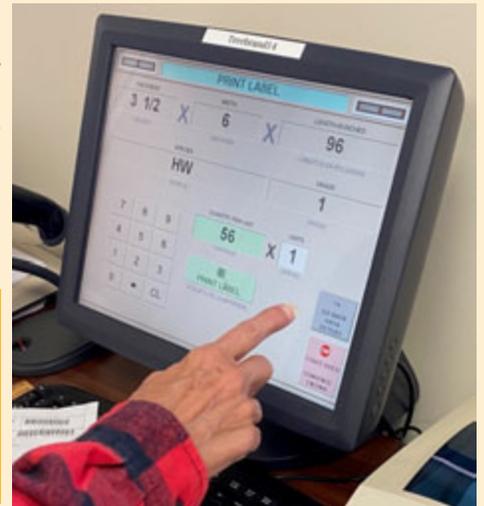
343
PAID
US POSTAGE
56102

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PALLET ENTERPRISE

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Tree Brand Packaging Boosts Efficiency, Teamwork through Timely Technology Investments

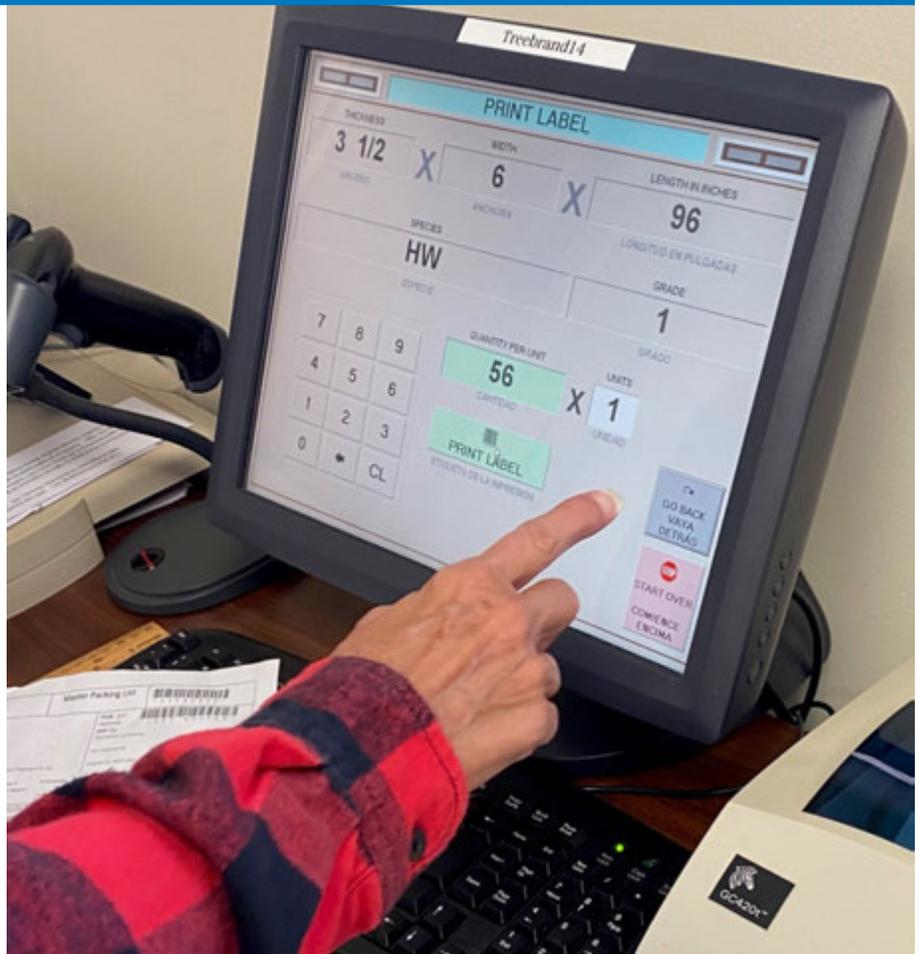
By Rick Leblanc



Solutions to Multiple Data Challenges: *Tree Brand Packaging needed a software solution for managing inventory, keeping track of production, storing container and pallet designs and integrating with its accounting program.*

As a leading regional producer of extra-long pallets and custom crating, Tree Brand Packaging has a wealth of expertise when it comes to producing complex products and just plain managing complexity. Tree Brand has locations serving North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama markets. The company serves roughly 150 customers with approximately 2,850 products from its Denver (Charlotte), North Carolina location alone. The opportunity to better manage its product drawings, specifications and inventory prompted the company in the direction of Pallet-Track Mill Manager™, an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution offered by Innovative Data Systems.

One of the triggers that piqued the company's interest in a technology solution was the departure of a seasoned supervisor and the need to have a cloud-based platform for customer requirements. Without expert oversight, any paper-based system is vulnerable to problems such as keeping track of up-

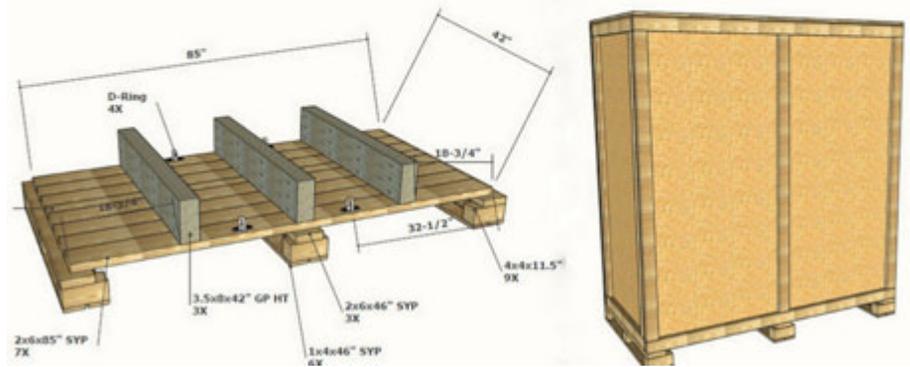


dated specifications or changes and avoiding any transcription errors, especially with a product mix as complex as what Tree Brand Packaging offers.

“That was the genesis of us saying, ‘Hey, we got to do this differently,’” explained Chris Helms, president of Tree Brand Packaging.

At the time, Tree Brand didn’t have a digital repository for its product specifications other than through the Pallet Design System (PDS)[™]. Due to the company’s emphasis on extra-long pallets and custom crating, however, it had to rely on CAD-based designs for a lot of items due to the uniqueness of its products. Over time, both CAD and PDS drawings have proven to integrate nicely into Mill Manager.

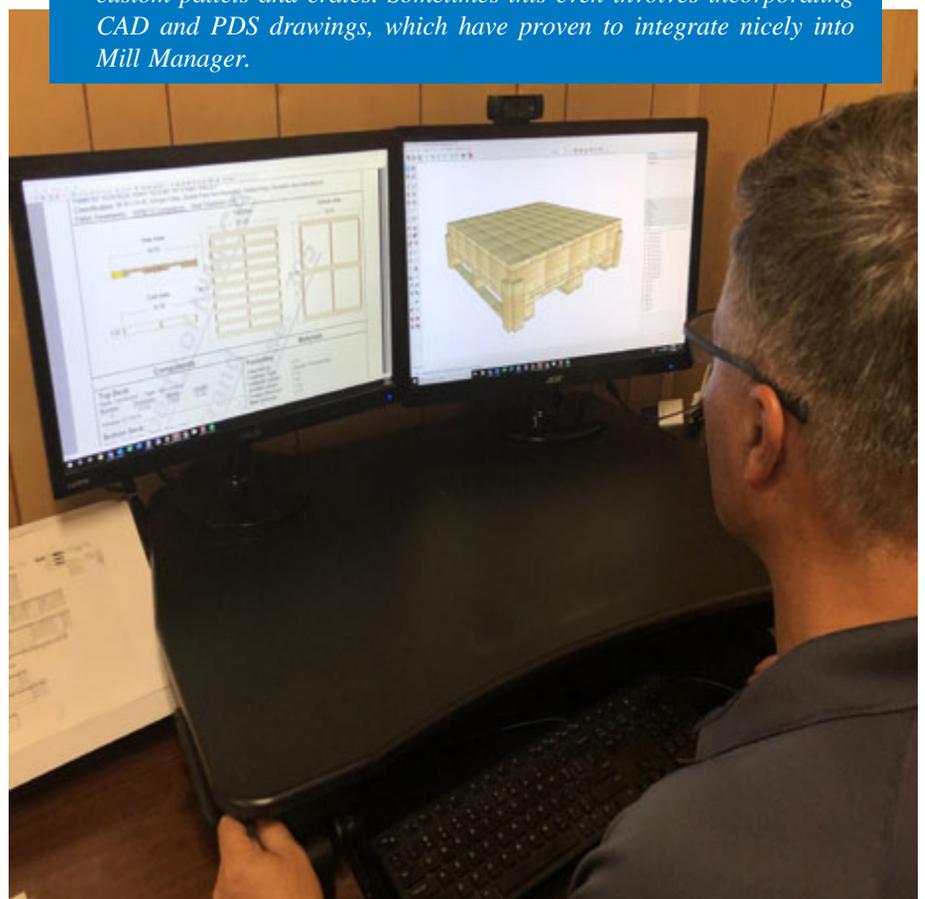
“We’re heavy into steel processors,” Helms said, “and steel processors don’t really use GMA-based pallets.” Steel producers, he noted, use long pallets. A popular size might be 48x120”, for example, with base variations depending upon the customer’s material handling equipment, whether it be overhead crane or forklift. At the other end of the spectrum, Tree Brand Packaging does highly specialized crates.



Complex, Custom Designs: Tree Brand Packaging specializes in custom pallets and crates. Sometimes this even involves incorporating CAD and PDS drawings, which have proven to integrate nicely into Mill Manager.

“Most ERP Systems today require you to match the processes of your facility to how the process works with the software. Pallet-Track[®] and its suite of products are different. We understand that it is much easier to implement a system that conforms to your current processes.”

— Alan Miceli, president of Innovative Data Systems



To take a step back, Tree Brand Packaging has been rooted to the steel industry since its launch in 1990 by Al Helms, who had retired as a steel company plant manager. He used his new venture to address two needs he observed from the customer perspective: consistent quality and world class service. Al's two sons quickly came onboard. Mike, currently company vice president, joined that same year after working in the steel sector. Chris, now president, became part of the company the following year after graduating NC State and working in the criminal justice field.



Online Driver Scheduling:

Drivers sign on to see their schedule. They can click on the address link and the system will provide them with turn by turn GPS directions.

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Shipments	Future Shipments	Delivered			
Shipper	Date Shipped	Ship Name			
Select	88213	Nov 6 2020	Customer ABC	125 Main Street	Print
Select	88214	Nov 6 2020	Customer B	695 Rough Rd, Charlotte, NC, 28208	Print
Select	88220	Nov 6 2020	Customer C	123 MyFavorite Rd, Charlotte, NC, 28208	Print
Select	88221	Nov 6 2020	Customer D	123 Anystreet St, Charlotte, NC, 28208	Print

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Mill Manager ERP Addresses Specific Needs for Tree Brand Packaging

Tree Brand Packaging was looking for a system that would facilitate easy changes to drawings, propagate them digitally through the system, and provide a convenient storage place. That solution was Mill Manager. To be sure, Mill Manager offers a plethora of benefits, but managing pallet drawings was top of mind at the time.

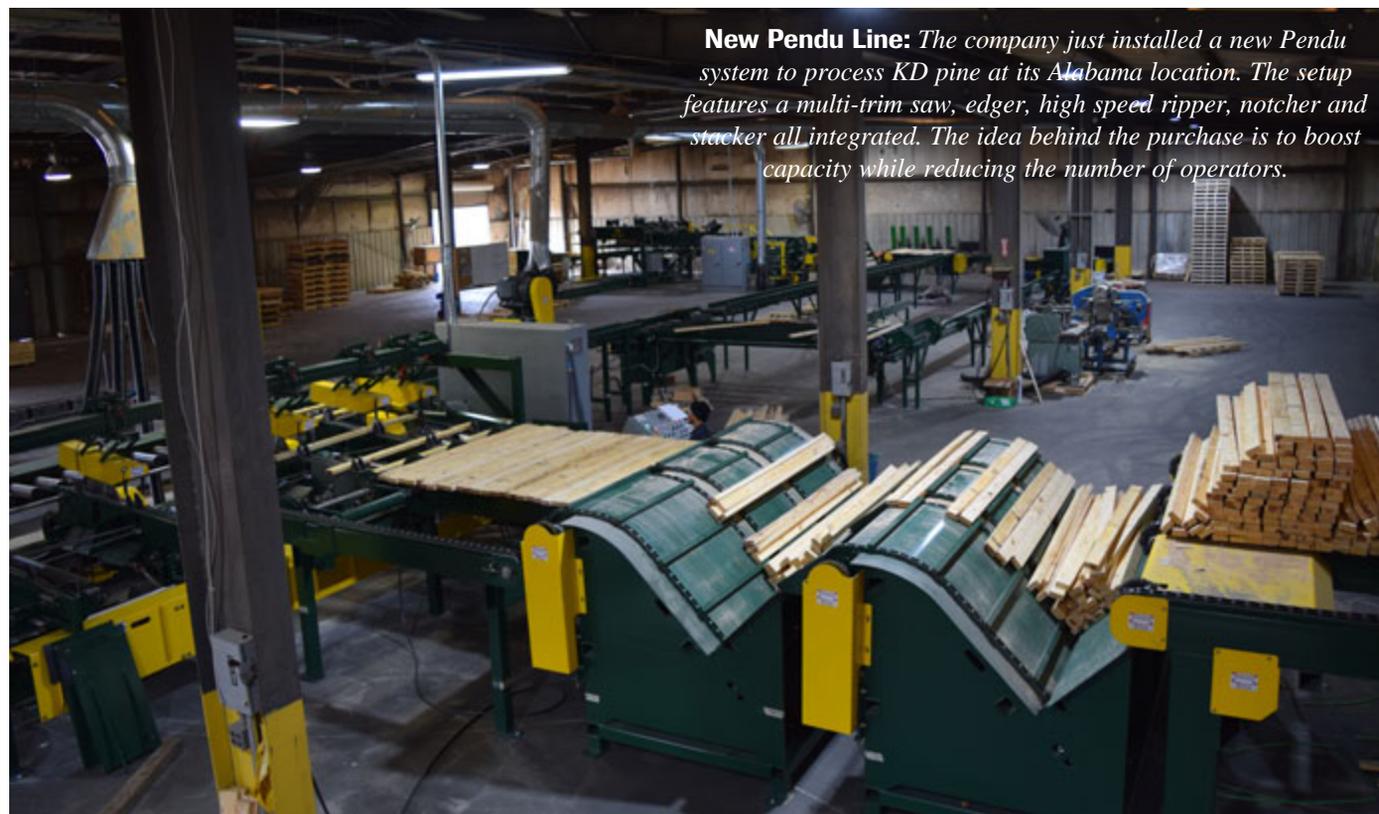
When Helms first contacted Alan Miceli, president of Innovative Data Systems, he was considering creating his own ERP solution. He had recently hired a production employee who was a coder and had worked on some sophisti-

cated industrial projects. Helms was upfront with Miceli that he was thinking about building his own system with the help of his recent hire. For his part, Miceli decided to be “an open book” as he put it, knowing that explaining the tricks is much easier than coding them.

At the end of the call, Miceli recalled, he asked Helms a single question. “Why would you want to pay someone to write all of this code only to find that they missed key points, ran over schedule and over budget,” he queried, “when you can just buy a turn-key system from us and save all of the aggravation and

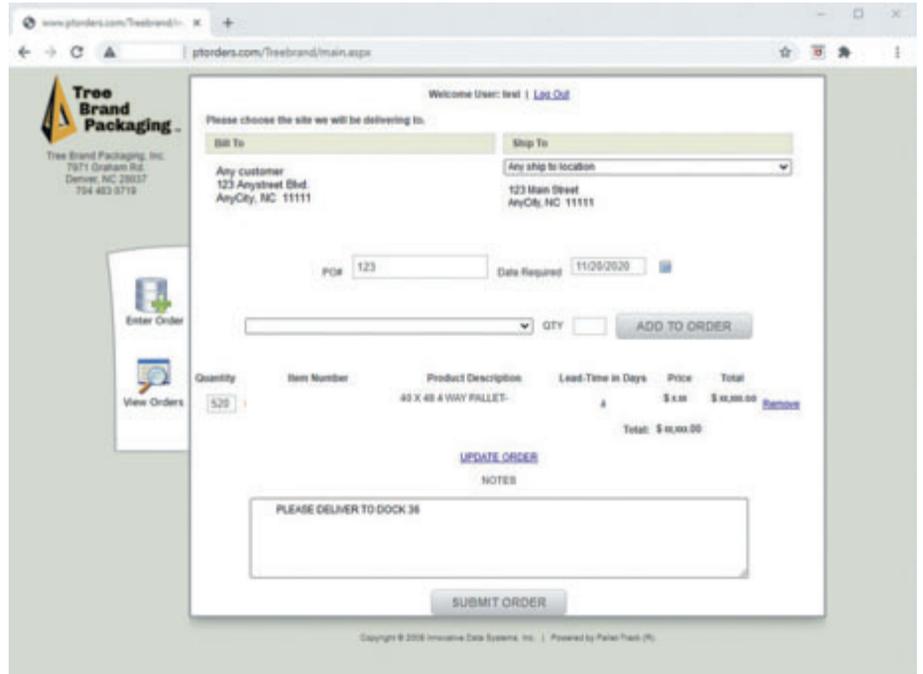


E-Signature Feature: When a driver arrives, he simply collects a signature right on his device. The customer and Tree Brand Packaging receive an email with a signature embedded into a pdf file. This file is stored, then sent as the POD with an electronic invoice.



New Pendu Line: The company just installed a new Pendu system to process KD pine at its Alabama location. The setup features a multi-trim saw, edger, high speed ripper, notcher and stacker all integrated. The idea behind the purchase is to boost capacity while reducing the number of operators.

“In terms of the data integration... we've went from not much to speak of, to all drawings online and online daily cut list that allows changes to be made almost instantly.”
— Chris Helms, president of Tree Brand Packaging



expense you are going to incur?”

It was not long after that call, Miceli recalled, that Helms ordered Mill Manager ERP along with plant floor kiosks, e-Signature and online ordering. “Tree Brand had specific needs that were important to them,” he added. “I assured him (Helms) we would be able to meet his needs.”

Online Ordering: *With the issues presented by COVID-19, customers can order from anywhere in the world using any browser. These orders integrate directly into Mill Manager avoiding any re-keying or mistakes.*

For his part, Helms stated that the Mill Manager team was responsive to the needs of Tree Brand Packaging.

Aside from managing specifications, the company was looking to address other specific challenges. These included

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managing kits and correctly matching kit components, knowing what material to cut for components, the need for an online system to track and order products based on customer inventory levels, and integration with its Business Works accounting software.

While the existing Mill Manager platform was set up to integrate other accounting programs such as QuickBooks and Peachtree, Tree Brand Packaging was the first customer to require an interface with Sage Business Works. Miceli was receptive to making the required changes. While the conversion did initially create some challenges on the accounting side, things eventually fell into place.

Today, Tree Brand Packaging uses Mill Manager to process all of its lumber purchases, track inventory levels, provide production requirements, schedule production, process all of its orders, create electronic BOLs and have it all integrate into Business Works.

Plant floor kiosks can display PDS drawings of every pallet they produce and even CAD-based designs of those really custom products that cannot be



Just-In-Time Delivery: *One service that Tree Brand Packaging offers is vendor managed inventory so that customers don't have to store excess packaging. Better data analytics improves the company's ability to ensure supply.*

drawn in PDS, like crates and other containers.

“Most ERP Systems today require you to match the processes of your facil-

ity to how the process works with the software,” Miceli offered. “Pallet-Track® and its suite of products are different. We understand that it is much

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easier to implement a system that conforms to your current processes.”

Mill Manager also provided Tree Brand Packaging with e-Signature, which allowed the company to convert from paper to a tablet-based solution for proof of delivery, a particularly timely benefit during the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, many features of Mill Manager are ideally suited for remote online activity, allowing activities to be managed safely from off-site, Miceli noted.

Thanks to Mill Manager and other technologies, the company has eliminated much of the burden of paperwork. “In terms of the data integration,” Helms stated, “we’ve went from not much to speak of, to all drawings online and online daily cut list that allows changes to be made almost instantly.” The company’s payroll is digital, and no checks are cut. “We’ve really progressed in some of these areas,” he said.

The paperless transformation starts at receiving, where the company now uses Mill Manager to generate an electronic PO (purchase order). Inbound truck drivers bring their paperwork into the office, where labels are generated using



Multiple Facilities to Better Serve Customers: Tree Brand Packaging has locations serving North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama markets.

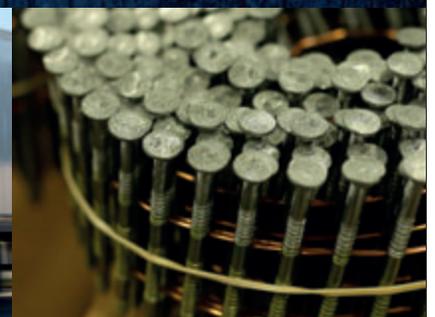
a plant floor kiosk, modified with a desktop, and the product is received. The driver then takes the labels to the Tree Brand Packaging forklift driver,

who matches labels to the product to verify accuracy. The receiving process also initiates the payment process. Bills are entered into Business Works with a

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Data Collection and Monitoring: *Tree Brand Packaging uses various Pallet-Track® Plant Floor Kiosks throughout its facilities to process and collect data efficiently and effectively.*

click of a button in Mill Manager.

Helms credits much of the success for the Mill Manager rollout to its core employees who bought in quickly. Aside from the long hours that Carlos Ugalde, plant manager, put in to convert all the drawings, the full transition took several years.

One thing that Tree Brand Packaging learned with the rollout was the importance of having the right label for the right climate. The rainy weather of North Carolina was a problem with its initial label, so it had to migrate to a more expensive and durable label. With the impending rollout at the Alabama location, Helms noted that the lumber is primarily stored inside due to customer requirements so the cheaper tag should work fine. Using tags with a bar code the NC plant can conduct its inventory using scanners in a much more efficient and accurate manner.

Tree Brand Packaging Locations and Equipment

Tree Brand Packaging locations include Denver (Charlotte), North Carolina; Ranburne Alabama; Chattanooga

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Tennessee; and Charleston South Carolina. The wood supply varies from location to location. Alabama is predominantly a southern yellow pine (SYP) KD supply base, while Tennessee is roughly 90% hardwood, for example. North Carolina is more along the lines of 70% cants, both hardwood and rough pine, and 30% KD.

Historically, Tree Brand Packaging has focused on used equipment, due to its unique product mix. For example, it has purchased several used Viking Duomatics and then “stretched” them. “We would lengthen the main frames to accommodate long length pallets,” he said.

Adding nailing machinery made pal-

let building somewhat faster, but the main benefits were improved worker safety and the reduction of fatigue. “At the end of the day, people are not as tired,” he said.

Tree Brand Packaging does purchase new, where it makes sense, however. The company just installed a new Pendu system to process KD pine at its Alabama location. The setup features a multi trim saw, edger, high speed ripper, notcher and stacker all integrated. The line started production in late October, and the team is excited. “It was quite a bit of money, but it can run with 2-3 people when we get it dialed in,” he said.

COVID-19 did accelerate some new technology deployments, including im-

proved camera systems at all of the plants, and the use of newly introduced platforms such as Microsoft Teams. The company uses Teams to help improve communications between locations, share best practices and to deliver training. With the upcoming installation of Mill Manager at the Alabama location, online training will undoubtedly play an important role.

While the steel industry is generally thought to be in decline, that hasn’t been the case in this region of the country as manufacturing growth continues to drive the need for steel. And as the steel industry has grown, Tree Brand Packaging has expanded right along with it, building on long-lasting relationships in the process. The company prides itself in serving manufacturers who have discerning needs when it comes to pallets. As Helms explained, the company works best when the customer values quality, on-time delivery, customer service, design/engineering and VMI services matter as much as price. For those customers, the company continues to excel in serving their long-term pallet and custom crating needs. 

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