

Automating Scale-House Operations at Landfills

If ever scale-house automation was welcomed, it was during the hurricane season of 2004, when the likes of Hurricane Charley ripped through Seminole County, FL, creating the ultimate solid waste disposal challenge.

By Carol Brzozowski

Garaventa Enterprises has franchise agreements for residential and commercial hauling in several cities in Northern California's East Bay area. The company has 250 employees, including 50 office staff members using the application.

Garaventa Enterprises started automating its operations two years ago, opting for a customized software operation for customer service and billing.

But the company needed more, seeking an operations package more geared toward the solid waste industry.

Sal Coniglio, who manages billing and collections and is the company's software administrator, heard positive word-of-mouth about Soft-Pak's products and technical support and made the switch.

Garaventa Enterprises automated its operations with Soft-Pak's Scale-Pak and Dash-Pak, as well as the customer service application, which integrates the hauling company and transfer station system.

Scale-Pak is used at Garaventa Enterprise's transfer station.

"With Scale-Pak, we can integrate our disposal company," says Coniglio. "The primary benefit is we have multiple companies that all link together and multiple facilities all sharing the same customer information."

Previous software was customized for each subsidiary.

"Now we have one software application, which gives us the ability to cross-train and move people within different departments," says Coniglio. "We are able to access information in a more companywide, uniform fashion."

"The customer service application is integrated with the scale system, and it's been very successful where, if we have a rolloff vehicle, we create a work order to dump and return a 40-yard box."

Previously, employees had to gather all of the landfill or transfer-station weight receipts, and once the container came back, the work order would be processed in the disposal company.

The company charges by the ton, so employees would have to manually type in the weight and calculate the costs.

"If it was over three tons, we'd have to manually key the weight for each container for each job that was dumped," says Coniglio. "With the Scale-Pak system, when that container hits the scale, each has a work order from the disposal company. That work order number is applied to the scale ticket and that weight information transfers over to our billing side."

The hauling and scale companies are integrated.

"Once that truck goes to the scale, the employee identifies the work order number from the hauling company and those weights transfer over and automatically do the billing. We verify it's correct and that the job was actually completed. It has cut down a lot of manual entry," says Coniglio.

Dash-Pak is a customized reporting program that integrates with the Soft-Pak database.

“With Dash-Pak, we’re able to design reports for our transfer station,” Coniglio says. “We see real-time tonnage, incoming tonnage, outbound tonnage. If I want to see the amount of cash being generated or received at the transfer station, it’s in real time. I don’t have to wait for information to be reconciled and then posted for the system. If I want to see right now what’s going on in our operation, Dash-Pak has provided a good tool for our operational report system.”

“One of our main goals in implementing the Soft-Pak application was not to decrease employees, but to increase productivity and redeploy our employees to do other tasks,” says Coniglio.

Coniglio favors the customer service and technical support he receives from Soft-Pak.

“What’s nice about the customer service application is it’s given our customer service rep the ability to have more accurate and real-time information,” he says. “It’s a work-order-driven-based system. That’s where we wanted to go. We wanted to see every extra pickup or when we’re going to pull a 96-gallon container or send a manager out to go visit a customer for whatever reason.

“We can see every job. The customer service application is easy to access. It’s easy for us to update billing information, service information, and create work orders. We haven’t had any issues with it.”

The automation has freed up employees to increase collections, processing and ensuring the refund process is more accurate.

“We are able to spend more time with our customer service instead of dealing with inaccurate information from our previous program or antiquated systems like we had before,” Coniglio says. “Not only can we help the customers more efficiently, but we can move employees from one department to another department and they still understand the basic platform of the system. It’s reduced our training time and increased our efficiency.”

Coniglio estimates it takes an average of a week to deal with the system’s learning curve and it will probably take a few years to recoup the return on the investment.

“If you look at the increased productivity with the software application, the return comes right away,” he says. “It took us at least a year to get it down to how we want to use the system, so for the first year it was a little hectic because we were used to doing one thing one way because your software application dictates how you are going to run your operation.

“We had an older system that helped us work in one operation, but with Soft-Pak, we had to change the way we did things. In a couple of years, I am sure we can see the increase in productivity with our employees to get some kind of return on investment.”

Coniglio has praise for Soft-Pak’s willingness to work for customers.

“We asked the system to do certain things the system didn’t do, and they were good about making changes for us,” he says. “That says a lot about their organization. If you look at their product, you see they are always willing to change and look further into GPS-tracking, onboard computing, barcode scanning, or whatever is the latest technology.

“One of the reasons we wanted to go with Soft-Pak is that we wouldn’t be stuck with having to deal with one application,” Coniglio adds. “When we wanted a customized recording package that would be easy to operate for an executive or manager who wasn’t very computer savvy, they came up with Dash-Pak, and that showed to us that they were willing to make changes and help their customers.”

Garaventa Enterprises hasn’t had down time due to automation for more than a few hours, notes Coniglio.

“We’ve had more issues with our own tech support with our own infrastructure—our routers for our DSL have been down—than we’ve had problems with Soft-Pak,” he says. “The few times where for whatever reason the system is down, we’re able to contact somebody, either at the office, at their home or on their cell phone and they’ve been good to work with. We are very happy with the system.”