Patrick Industries Automates Their iSeries World
With Robot/SCHEDULE® and Robot/REPORTS®

By Bob Balderson

When a company grows and its product base expands, its view of the world also grows and expands. As the view changes, the trick is to stay focused and remain organized. A classic example is Patrick Industries. In 1959, Patrick Industries started out as the Merv Lung Building Company, supplying paneling to the Manufactured Housing industry in Elkhart, Indiana. Over the years, the company grew, went public, and extended into other markets including recreational vehicles, furniture, and cabinet manufacturing. Today, Patrick Industries is a $300 million company, located across 13 states, with 27 manufacturing and distribution centers. The recreational vehicle and manufactured housing industries represent more than 70% of their volume, but they also manufacture and distribute a wide variety of items, including aluminum products, high pressure laminates, moldings, drawers, doors, and adhesives.

To handle their ever-expanding manufacturing and distribution needs, Patrick Industries relies on a powerful combination of hardware and software. For hardware, they use an IBM® eServer™ iSeries™ model i825. For software they use World from Oracle® (formerly JD Edwards World) for enterprise-level control and monitoring of their systems and processes. To automate the iSeries portion of their operations, they use two packages from Help/Systems: Robot/SCHEDULE, the automated job scheduler, and Robot/REPORTS, the iSeries report management package.

On the iSeries, Patrick Industries combines World, Robot/SCHEDULE, and Robot/REPORTS to automate printing and distribution of iSeries reports. On average, they use Robot/REPORTS to process more than 200 user-submitted reports daily, more than 100 scheduled reports nightly, and numerous weekly and monthly reports. During a typical month, they print more than 230,000 pages of reports for order entry, purchasing, and pro-

duction scheduling. That number has been reduced significantly since the introduction of Robot/REPORTS and online viewing. Patrick Industries employees now view thousands of pages online each month using Robot/REPORTS.

Deborah Richardson, Patrick Industries' Operations Supervisor in charge of day-to-day operations, explains how their iSeries report management has evolved. "Before Robot/REPORTS, we used primitive bursting software. It let us direct report segments to a printer, but we had no viewing capabilities or banners to help with report distribution, and the software was difficult to maintain."

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All that changed with Robot/REPORTS as Patrick Industries took advantage of a number of powerful features. "The feature we use most is the ability to segment reports by a particular location on a report page. The feature that has really saved us money is online viewing—currently, we view over 175,000 pages per month online as view-only reports that are printed only if the recipient decides it's necessary."

Deborah admits that, at first, there was some resistance—online viewing was a hard sell because people wanted a piece of paper in front of them. In fact, at first everything was set up for both printing and viewing. After their initial adjustment period, however, people realized they would rather have the report online than have it clutter up their desk. To help with people who still requested a large number of printed pages, Patrick Industries used OPAL® (OPerator Assistance Language®— Help/Systems' operations language)

to illustrate how to use online viewing and its advantages. With HILITE OPAL code, they could mark specific report lines in color so report recipients could scan a report quickly for critical information. For example, someone in Accounting could browse a large report quickly to locate highlighted financial information.

In addition to online viewing, another big piece of automated report management for Patrick Industries is distribution. It's not uncommon for Robot/REPORTS to process a 5,000-page report for bursting (they've sent even larger reports in the past). By using Robot/REPORTS to burst these reports, complete with a banner to expedite proper delivery, each division receives only the appropriate pages. As Deborah explains, "Currently, we have more than 200 jobs running each night. If we had to run a separate job for each division, we'd be running thousands of jobs a night. Believe me, trying to maintain the scheduling would not be fun."

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Patrick Industries uses a combination of OPAL code, user data from World, special report segments, and standard identifiers to automatically burst, distribute, and print their reports to multiple locations. For their division reports, the process is iterative. First, Robot/SCHEDULE runs a job that submits a report to a monitored output queue. Information in a user data field, specified in World, identifies how the report should be burst, distributed, and printed. When a new report arrives in the queue, Robot/REPORTS compares the attributes of the spooled

file to its internal list. From that it determines the bursting instructions, prints a copy of the report at the division office, and distributes a copy to each recipient in the form they requested.

Patrick Industries also uses Robot/REPORTS to break division reports into smaller, more specific segments. A division's segment is sent back through Robot/REPORTS via the monitored output queue. A modified user data field on the new spooled file provides different bursting instructions that Robot/REPORTS uses to create the smaller report.

Deborah also likes many of the other Robot/REPORTS features, especially its usability. "Another reason Robot/REPORTS is really valuable to me is because of its ease-of-use. I can train a new operator, one who doesn't know OS/400 and hasn't worked on a midrange or mainframe computer, and have them changing report distributions within an hour. That's why Help/Systems products are always the first applications we teach our new operators. Some of the other significant benefits we've seen from our Help/Systems products include: the need for fewer printers in the company; reduced printer, paper, and labor costs; a definite increase in productivity; and an enhanced ability to share information."

When Patrick Industries first purchased Robot/REPORTS, Deborah naturally had some questions. So, she turned to Help/Systems' Technical Support staff. As she describes it, "I asked a lot of questions. They [the Support staff] were wonderful and helped me as much as possible. In fact, everyone I dealt with at Help/Systems was truly wonderful." A nice beginning to the continuing story of how Patrick Industries uses World Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software and the Robot products to help run their business and automate their iSeries.

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