



SOUTHERN MILLS IMPROVES CHECK PRINTING OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCIES & SECURITY

Southern Mills has a long history, going back to 1925, as an innovator in the textile manufacturing industry. Early on the company developed a focus on protective fabrics, special materials that are highly resistant to heat and fire.

Today Southern Mills has a mission to manufacture high performance protective textiles by engineering technically advanced materials and provide them to the global industrial, emergency response, and government sectors as well as other niche markets requiring protection against potentially harmful environments.

Southern Mills is headquartered in Union City, Georgia, and operates five manufacturing facilities all located in Georgia within an hour drive of the Corporate Office. The company employs a total of 540 people in the headquarters office and across the five plants.

"It used to take the accounting clerk all morning to do a check run. There were several machines involved...the impact printer, a decollater, the signature machine, and a burster...which made the process complex. Now we have AvantGard Secure32, a laser printer and a folder sealer machine. The same process now takes less than an hour!"

- Steve Huster, Director of Information Services Southern Mills

Southern Mills

Industry: Manufacturing

Problem: In 1996 Southern Mills was using an internally developed solution to manage manufacturing and accounting processes. Though the company had plans to replace this internal solution, a higher priority at the time related to the check production process. The company was using pre-printed check stock, an impact printer, and another internally developed software system to manage the printing process. This combination of tools and associated processes had management concerned for several legitimate reasons, including:

- The in-house print solution did not provide sufficient security and control over the check printing process.
- Use of pre-printed check stock presented numerous security and production challenges.
- There was little flexibility to alter form designs, or manage changes to forms, such as bank account and address changes.
- Misfeeds and jams were common resulting from stock that was not perfectly aligned in the impact printer.
- Check registers and reconciliation files had to be adjusted every time checks failed to print properly, so that reprints would match pre-printed check numbers.
- Printed checks had to be run through a heat seal machine with signature plates.
- A mismatched signature plate meant starting the print process all over again.
- Checks had to be run through a burster machine to strip edges and separate copies from original checks.

Solution: AvantGard Secure32

When Southern Mills decided to replace their check production solution, they had a number of stringent requirements, including the following:

- Replace pre-printed check stock with blank check stock.
- Eliminate the impact printer and move to a laser printer instead.
- Replace the in-house software with a solution providing complete security and control over the entire process.
- Gain a solution that would provide flexibility for check design and maintenance.
- Avoid alteration of the accounting system, through continued use of the same check record files that were previously bound for the impact printer.

A careful search for a new solution was conducted by the Corporate Controller, who ultimately decided that AvantGard Secure32 was the best solution available to meet the needs of Southern Mills.

In AvantGard Secure32, Southern Mills saw a payment solution that could meet all of the immediate requirements they had. Furthermore, they felt AvantGard Secure32 would be capable of growing with the business and scaling to meet future requirements. While the Controller was confident in the application choice, with AvantGard Secure32 being a commercial software package refined over nearly two decades, he was also confident that AvantGard could provide all the supporting services that Southern Mills might require.

The last requirement above, relating to file acceptance from the accounting system, took on special significance to Southern Mills. Soon after implementing AvantGard Secure32, the Company decided to replace their core ERP system with a solution from Ross Systems. Designed to accept varying formats from virtually any accounting system, AvantGard Secure32 easily met the challenge posed by the new ERP system. Without any change to the Ross system, AvantGard Secure32 began taking output from the new system with little to no interruption to the check production process.

Result: "AvantGard Secure32 is a very straightforward tool and it requires minimal training. It has proven to be very flexible, and to put things simply, it just works well. We have not only used it for accounts payable checks, but for payroll checks, statements, invoices, and end-of-year tax forms. Best of all, we have been able to eliminate the multi-part forms previously required for our old impact printer." - Steve Huster, Director of Information Services, Southern Mills

AvantGard Secure32 has proven to be a secure, flexible and reliable solution to meet the check printing requirements of Southern Mills. In use for most of a decade, following are some of the benefits the Company has received:

- While security breaches in the payment process were a great concern with the old solution, there have been no known security breakdowns since implementation.
- The versatility of Secure32 to accept a wide variety of file formats has been leveraged to avoid modification to core accounting systems. As accounting systems have changed, simple modifications were made on the Secure32 side to deal with different formats and continue check production without delay.
- Secure32 has eliminated the need for pre-printed check stock, and all the hassles and concerns associated with it.
- Access to a flexible forms design tool has allowed Southern Mills to keep pace with numerous bank account, address and logo changes over the years. The tool also facilitated easy migration from plain stock to Z fold stock.
- Though primarily used for accounts payable checks, Secure32 and SDDW proved flexible to produce payroll checks during a two-year transition period from one payroll accounting system to another. This flexibility has also been called on to produce statements, invoices and end-of-year tax forms at various points in time.

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