

# ROBOT HELPS LAMPS PLUS® LIGHT THE WAY

By Chuck Losinski

Established in 1976, Lamps Plus has brought excellence to the retail lighting industry for more than 35 years. Today, they are the nation's largest specialty lighting company with more than 40 superstores throughout the western United States. They serve over five million customers a year with functional and decorative lighting products, in-home lighting consultations, in-store lighting seminars, and certified designers who offer lighting recommendations.

John Dunn, the IT Operations Manager for Lamps Plus, has worked in IT for more than twenty years. He describes their current hardware and software setup: "We use Manhattan Associates' Warehouse Management System (WMS) software, and we're moving towards their Distribution Management suite. One of our primary goals was to automate nightly processes across both the IBM i platform and our order management system, which is on an AIX® platform. For hardware, we have two partitioned IBM i 525 systems: a production system here in Chatsworth, CA, and our warehouse and disaster recovery system in Redlands, CA, about 95 miles away."

## Aiming for Complete Automation

John's goal for Lamps Plus was to automate their evening shift, including cross-platform processing. The Point-of-Sale (POS) system uses Windows servers, but all of their production processing happens on the IBM i platform. So, they use Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise, the enterprise job scheduling software, on the Windows servers to alert them when store sales arrive; and they automatically FTP these files to the IBM i platform for processing.

As John explains, "We used the Robot products to automate, to reduce overtime, and to monitor the QSYSOPR message queue. Robot/ALERT® [text, e-mail, and pager messaging software] works with Robot/SCHEDULE® [job scheduling and batch job management software] to pick up job monitor features. Meanwhile, Robot/CONSOLE® [message management and resource monitoring software] automatically answers and escalates messages—if a message comes up for a job, somebody knows about it. You don't want to come in the morning, have no alerts or errors, and think everything is fine. Then you find out the reason there were no errors is because nothing ran. The checks and balances in our automated process notify us if something goes wrong, or if something doesn't run by a certain time."

## AT A GLANCE

### Industry

Retail Lighting

### Business Challenges

- Need to run processes nightly on IBM i, Windows, AIX
- Too much overtime due to manual processing
- Bringing new systems into the fold requires in-depth knowledge

### Solution

Robot/CONSOLE  
Robot/SCHEDULE  
Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise

### Business Results

- Staff has time to focus on more complicated tickets
- Staff can automate virtually any message
- Staff can make changes across all partitions
- Staff finds problems early and avoids unnecessary upgrades

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## Big Help from Tech Support

John enlisted some powerful Help/Systems resources to help automate his processes. "Help/Systems Technical Support helped me set up checkpoint jobs—using jobs within job processes as alerts. Each process has multiple checkpoint jobs. If a checkpoint job doesn't run, an alert gets sent. So, I can see that one part ran, but the next part didn't. And these checkpoint jobs are reactive, so if a job doesn't start, I know about it immediately, not the next day when I walk in. That means we can get on the system and do something about it. It's nice—if we're running unattended, I want more things telling me what's going on, not fewer."

Lamps Plus sales are processed on Windows® servers and sent using FTP to the production IBM i system in Chatsworth. The process updates the information on the warehouse system in Redlands, and the order management system is synchronized with the warehouse management system. All systems are in sync and all processes are automatic.

## Cross-Platform Automation

Lamps Plus uses Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise to take advantage of both enterprise scheduling and cross-system reactivity. "We run processes across multiple systems each night automatically. During the nightly process, five Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise jobs react to each other and control about one hundred other jobs. We use OPAL® (OPerator Assistance Language), date objects, and the Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise built-in FTP process. Before, this was a manual process that took hours. Now, just one click in Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise and the entire process runs. With automation, Sunday actually becomes a day off, the night shift is unmanned, and the operators only have to work at night if there are errors."

## Training and Future Goals

John was really impressed with the training. "I've been getting my training from the Help/Systems Support team. I'd never used Robot/SCHEDULE or Robot/SCHEDULE

Enterprise before, but I've dealt with other scheduling tools and automation, so the concepts weren't foreign.

"The Help/Systems Support team showed me how to use the products and offered some incredible ideas. They'd often say, 'Have you thought about trying this?' I mean, the first couple of months I was in awe. It was like, 'Wow, this software has a lot more bells and whistles than any other software tool I've used.' In fact, there were so many, I didn't even know which questions to ask."

As for what the near future holds, John is clear. "Our next plan is to bring the AIX systems into the fold. That's actually why we looked at Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise—we wanted to manage all of our systems from a single application. I didn't want to use multiple schedulers—a Windows scheduler, cron on AIX, and another scheduler on the IBM i—have everything time-based, and hope it all comes together. Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise is perfect because I have Windows jobs, AIX jobs, and IBM i jobs reacting to each other."

## A Great ROI with Robot

Johns is also excited about the immediate payoff of their automation efforts. "As for our return on investment (ROI), comparing the six months after we started using Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise to the six months prior, we reduced overtime by 27%. Not to mention fewer errors and a better quality of life. Once we're completely automated, I think we'll see some real big reductions in errors and overtime."

As John explains, the automation software has become so popular that it now has its own in-house identity. "At first, it was the operators and the application team saying, 'Hey, can Robot do this?' Then, it started to snowball. Now, we call the two of them, Robot/SCHEDULE and Robot/SCHEDULE Enterprise, 'Mr. Robot'. Typically, we say, 'We need to put Mr. Robot to work'. 'Okay, so what does he need to do?'"

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