



## Eberl Iron Works Focus on Productivity and Product

### OVERVIEW

Region: Buffalo, NY, USA  
Industry: Metal Fabrication

### Customer Profile

Eberl Iron Works, Inc has four Divisions headquartered in Buffalo, New York (NY). The Metal Fabrication Division has over 80 years of experience in the custom fabrication of metal sheets and plates. The Unistrut Buffalo Division sells Unistrut metal framing and Grip Strut expanded metal safety grating. The Traffic Safety Products Division sells traffic control products, street sign post equipment and parking lot safety supplies. The System Installation Division designs and installs Fall Arrest safety systems and Unistrut medical supports. Eberl Iron Works has served its customers with unbeatable quality and exceptional service since 1923.

### Business Situation

Eberl's management team knew that their historic company would benefit by updating business practices, freeing up floor space in their increasingly constrained production facilities, and by improving the look and professionalism of product documentation and their web presence.

### Solution

In July of 2006, Eberl began a partnership with UB's Center for Industrial Effectiveness that continues today. Projects have ranged from Lean efficiency improvements to CAD drafting support and improvements to the company web site and e-business capabilities.

Founded in 1923 by George and Frank Eberl, Eberl Iron Works started as a small welding shop which fabricated wrought iron railings, exterior fire escapes and miscellaneous iron.

Distribution began in 1946 with the introduction of Unistrut metal framing, followed shortly thereafter by Grip Strut safety grating. Soon after, the Unistrut Buffalo Division was formed to sell a variety of non-residential building products throughout Upstate New York. Regional sales representatives and customer service staff provide assistance for a customer's project from inception to completion.

In 1991, the Systems Installation Division began to focus on the design and installation of medical support systems, fall arrest systems, ceiling grids and other specialty systems.

In 2003, the Traffic Safety Products Division was formed to market sign posts, delineators and other traffic products to both the highway and property management markets.

Today, the second generation brothers, Frank and George Eberl, have been joined by the third generation, Nora and John Eberl. Whether it's fabricating metal, selling products or installing systems, the Eberls and the entire Eberl team continue the Tradition of Service.





John Eberl, Sales and Marketing Director, shows off a new shear machine. 5S Lean improvements freed up much-needed floor space, helping to accommodate new equipment.

**“We didn’t have a lot of space, and Lean has helped us make the most of what we have. We have better positioned material staging areas and we were able to install some new equipment that we simply didn’t have room for before. On top of this, Lean improvements contributed to our producing 400,000 lbs more throughput in 2007.”**

- John Eberl,  
Sales and  
Marketing Director

## Situation

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## Embracing Lean

In all, Eberl received 184 hours of training in Lean Concepts ranging from 5S to Value Stream Mapping and Pull/Kanban tools. Value Stream Mapping, particularly for Eberl's stair pan product line, helped the company to gain a better sense of process flow from receipt of RFP to shipping. Material handling improvements and elimination of process waste resulted in 400,000 pounds of increased throughput in 2007. This represented a 15% improvement without any increase of manhours.

5S improvements were also significant, freeing up floor space for staging areas and new equipment. Improvements focused on visual workplace organization tools in the shipping office, in office supply areas, and in the warehouse. Color-coded shadow boards help keep tools in place where operators can reach them easily.

## e-Business Capability

Eberl's partnership with TCIE included employment of graduate student resources. Vishwac Sena Kannan, a computer science graduate student, helped Eberl make significant improvements to its e-business capabilities. Improvements included an Excel/Access-based tool for estimating customer orders, based on varying specifications. This tool is configured to accommodate inquiries for quotes from Eberl's website. Vishwac also advised Eberl on how to improve leverage with on-line search engines. Eberl was able to negotiate higher search engine rankings, leading to a 30-40% engine ranking increase for the company's traffic safety products. This produced about a dozen qualified leads within seven months.



Nora Eberl, Controller, monitors product inquiries from visitors to their improved company website.

**“UB students have turned out to be a fabulous resource for us. They bring a very up-to-date set of skills and have surprised us with what they have been able to accomplish. We look forward to a long partnership with UB and its talented resources.”**

- Nora Eberl,  
Controller

### For More Information

For more information about TCIE products and services, call our offices at (716) 636-2538. To access information using the World Wide Web, go to:  
<http://www.tcie.buffalo.edu/>

For more information about Eberl's products and services visit the Web site at:  
<http://www.eberliron.com>

### CAD Product Documentation

In the Spring of 2008, Eberl brought on Jon Barsa, an undergraduate in the Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering Department. Jon helped to develop CAD standards for Eberl product lines,

supporting the launch of a new product. Jon's work has included improvements to the on-line product catalogue and an internal library of design standards that is housed on Eberl's server.

### Summary and Benefits

Eberl's partnership with TCIE introduced it to modern efficiency improvement tools and the cost-effective resources that UB's engineering students offer to area companies.

Some of the benefits that Eberl has achieved include the following:

- 15% improvement to throughput in the first year following Lean training.
- Streamlined material handling and more optimal use of space in production, warehouse, and office. Space has been freed up to accommodate new equipment installations.
- On-line specification capability; higher search engine ranking and 300% increase in web hits.
- Improved CAD drawings for products that support quoting/proposals, on-line catalogue, and improve credibility with customers and vendors alike.

### UB Center for Industrial Effectiveness

The Center for Industrial Effectiveness (TCIE) is a program of the School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. We deliver world class solutions to our customers utilizing the best people, the best methods and the right technology. For more information about TCIE, go to:

<http://www.tcie.buffalo.edu/>

#### Productivity Solutions

- Lean Six Sigma Training
- Strategic Development
- Executive Coaching
- Facility Layouts
- Engineering Services
- Product Testing & Development
- Business Management System

#### Partners

- Strategic Partnership for Industrial Resurgence (SPIR)
- New York State Department of Labor