Seegars Fence Company Partners with Nowsight to Drive Unprecedented Growth and Business Visibility

AT-A-GLANCE
THE IMPACT OF BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE ON SEEGARS FENCE COMPANY

- Eliminated 4,000 hours annually in reporting business performance data, the equivalent of twofull-time employees

- Delivers six times more data to company leadership than past reporting systems and the information is available 24/7

- 14 weekly Excel spreadsheets replaced by a single, graphical webpage that is easy to understand and act on

- Provides individual and companywide visibility into goals and progress towardssales goals and other key performance indicators (KPIs)

- Maximizes investments in AccountMate and other data gathering systems

An easy way to grasp why Seegars Fence Company has thrived for over seven decades is to understand its favorite type of project. "The more complicated and difficult the project, the more we like it," said CEO Ben Seegars, a third-generation leader of the family-owned business.

That's not just the observation of a proud CEO who literally grew up in the fencing business. In fact, when other fencing companies encounter complex projects they know they can't handle, they often refer customers to Seegars. "It's not uncommon for our competition to actually recommend that customers call us when the application is extremely complex and they really don't want to touch it," said Bobby Batchelor, the company's COO. "We will jump right in on that."

A thirst for the most challenging projects is just one reason why Seegars has grown from a Goldsboro, North Carolina farmer supply business into a 14-location, 285-employee outfit serving over 13,000 customers each year in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia. One indispensable ingredient to the company's decades of success has been its unwavering philosophy about how to treat each and every customer.

"We've been in business for 71 years and we certainly couldn't do that if we took advantage of people," said Seegars. "We've gotten there by treating other people the way we would want to be treated."

A THRIVING BUSINESS HIDDEN BEHIND SPREADSHEETS

While the bedrock philosophy of Seegars has remained constant throughout its long history, the company has long understood the importance of continuously evolving to better serve employees and customers. In the early days of the company, that meant transitioning its farm supply business from one that included fencing as one of many services to a company focused exclusively on fencing.

In more recent years, Seegars has embraced the importance of technology and data to help it navigate and fully capitalize on the company's explosive growth. A few years ago, for example, the company upgraded its customer relationship management (CRM) and more recently implemented AccountMate's accounting software. To help make sense of the data being collected in a variety of systems, the company designed dashboards to display key performance indicators (KPI), which are quantifiable measures of an organization's success, such as sales, costs, and profits. This information was displayed to give executives and managers better visibility into business performance and developing trends.

While certainly an improvement, company leadership was savvy enough to know it still faced significant challenges in its ability to fully leverage data to identify trends, inefficiencies, and new opportunities. Perhaps nobody felt those challenges and limitations more acutely than Veronica Aycock, Business Manager at Seegars. Every Sunday, Aycock would receive a tsunami of information sent to her by each of Seegars' 14 branches – information that required three to five hours of work at each branch to compile – and have to painstakingly consolidate it into one sprawling Excel spreadsheet.
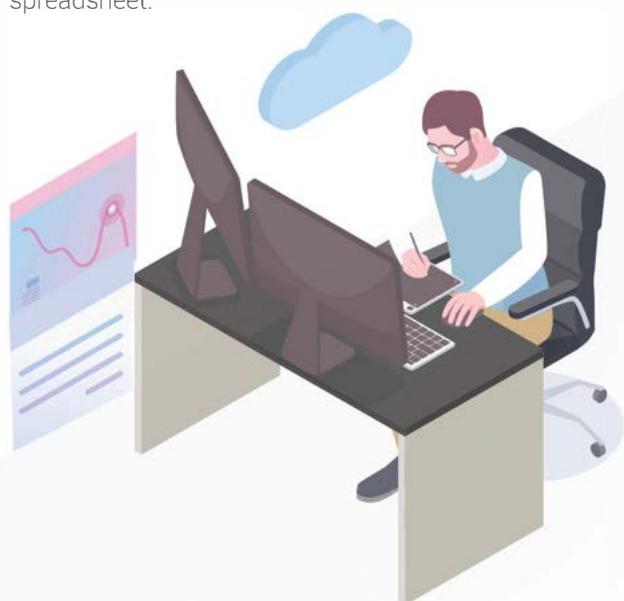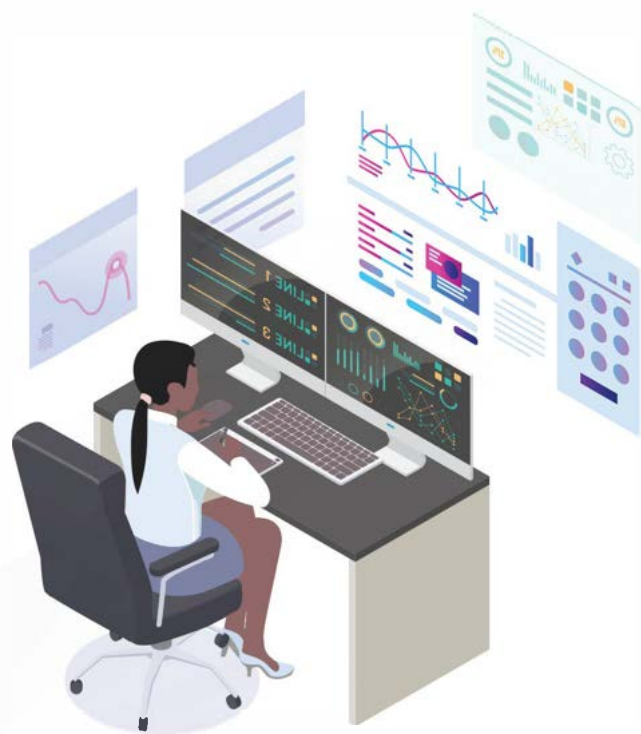
> " Combining and rationalizing the data was so time-consuming, it was impossible to then look for insights and have the data still be timely. "
>
> *Veronica Aycock,*
> *Seegars Business Manager*

The amount of time required to consolidate all of the information into the one Excel spreadsheet that Aycock delivered to company leaders each Monday morning left little time to pinpoint valuable insights. "Combining and rationalizing the data was so time-consuming, it was impossible to then look for insights and have the data still be timely," said Aycock. "We still ran this business on Excel. Excel pulling from an SQL database, but it was still Excel."

The heavy reliance on Excel also meant that visibility into company performance and reporting depended almost exclusively on Aycock and her ability to navigate the many quirks of Excel – hardly a recipe for standardization and scale. "There were so many things that we did just to make it work," she said. "I had these little exceptions all over the place." Another hard truth was that the information being collected was often out of date before anybody could look at it, let alone act on it. It was nobody's fault. There's just an inherent time lag involved when you have to collect and consolidate data into a spreadsheet and then work to make that information understandable and actionable.

The company's journey towards greatly improved use of real-time data began when Ben Seegars and Bobby Batchelor met with Nowsight, a Wilmington, North Carolina-based business intelligence company. Though Batchelor and Seegars took the initial meeting because of a family connection, the two executives emerged from the hour-and-a-half discussion with Nowsight's Michael Schader and Adam Burke with a new understanding of how data could transform their company.

> *We realized we could leap 10 years forward, basically overnight, and make decisions based on real-time information. We were just blown away and thought, 'this is going to be unbelievable.' And it has been.*
>
> **Ben Seegars, Seegars CEO**

On a big picture level, perhaps the best way to think about Nowsight's objective in working with Seegars was to help the company tell meaningful and motivating stories with the data it was already collecting. "When you make investments in systems like AccountMate, those are what we call enablement systems that capture data and information in one place," said Schader, who is CEO of Nowsight. "Seegars has a great enablement system. What we helped them with was engagement. That's when you take all of that data and present it in a way that tells stories that get employees emotionally engaged and enthused to do their work smarter and better."

In all of the work Nowsight does with customers, the ultimate objective is to ensure that employees are devoting their time to work that either generates or saves money for the company. Far too many companies have 80% of their employees spending 50% of their work time putting together spreadsheets. Nowsight frees them to provide real value to their business, and at a cost typically less than full-time equivalent employee annually. Up-to-date, relevant data can simultaneously liberate and empower employees.

The partnership with Seegars began with Nowsight getting a clear answer to a number of fundamental questions. What data did Seegars need to track? Why is that information important? What's the best way to display that information so that it can be easily understood and acted on?

WHAT RESULTS DO YOU WANT TO DELIVER?

With a good understanding of Seegars' unique needs and objectives, Nowsight set about connecting the company's sales quoting, accounting, and inventory systems and building dashboards to clearly display the most important and up-to-date metrics and results.

"We knew immediately that we could provide tremendous value to Seegars' business," said Schader. "The amount of manipulation they were manually doing to their data was staggering, and ripe for Nowsight's unique, actionable business intelligence." Besides eliminating countless hours of manual work required to collect and share data, the implementation of Nowsight has also helped Seegars executives and employees make quick sense of the information.

For the individual branches and managers, the implementation of Nowsight meant more than the elimination of hours of work collecting and consolidating data. It also has provided each branch the ability to see in real-time how they were performing compared to their peers.

That's possible because Nowsight utilizes intelligent algorithms and machine learning that ensure business data is delivered to sales people, branch managers, and executives in near real-time. The rapid delivery and intuitive display of data allows the company to set daily priorities and quickly react to business changes.

> *It's not just data being displayed, it's in the context of our business and our goals. It's amazing the amount of data we can take immediate action on.*
>
> *Bobby Batchelor, Seegars COO*

BUSINESS INTELLIGENCE EQUALS AN INTELLIGENT BUSINESS
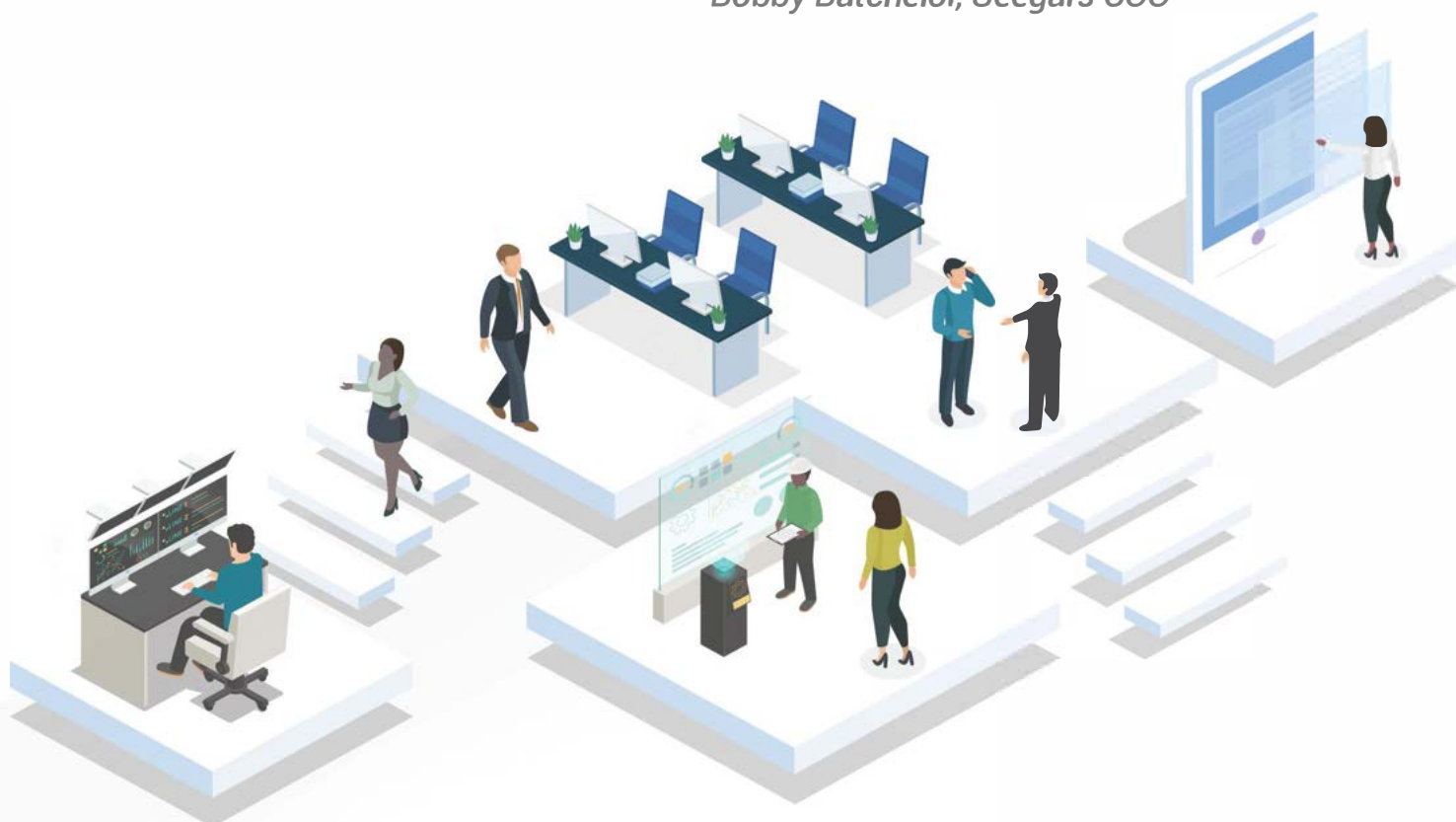
Widespread access to timely, relevant, and contextualized data has fundamentally transformed how Seegars' employees, managers, and executives operate and make decisions. One of the most powerful examples of how democratizing access to data has improved company performance is among Seegars' sales force.

Thanks to Nowsight, individual salespeople now receive daily emails that show exactly how close that person is to their sales goal, how many days they have left to achieve it, and where they stand compared to their colleagues. Similar metrics are provided to individual branch managers, alerting them to their progress towards monthly and yearly goals, how they're doing compared to the prior year, and whether they are ahead or behind other branches.

It's information that instinctively triggers the competitiveness of salespeople. "We've seen people that a year-and-a-half ago were adequate salesmen, at best, rise up to be in the top five performers pretty consistently," said Batchelor.

> ❝
> *The ability for me to see problems and standouts, within branches or the business as a whole, with just a click, is game changing.*
> ❞
>
> *Ben Seegars, Seegars CEO*

The benefit isn't just that the Seegars' sales team receives repeated updates on how their individual performance compares to their peers. Seegars also has a pay-for-performance bonus based on a scorecard with five metrics. The daily email delivers updates on that as well. "The five metrics on the scorecard are all things that they control that are specific to their role with the company and their bonus is multiplied by the net profitability of the company," said Seegars. "A lot of the metrics that we monitor in Nowsight and that we email our sales team every morning gets them fired up to get out there and blow those goals out of the water."

Having a shared platform that contains up-to-date and relevant data has also improved the ability of managers to provide feedback and helped to drive organizational alignment. Indeed, Batchelor looks at Nowsight daily – often more than once – and uses the information to deliver encouragement and guidance to his sales team. By doing that, he provides a reminder to his sales force that he's looking at the data frequently and that it's important to him. "I want them to know that so that it will also become important to them," said Batchelor.

The information provided by Nowsight also gives Batchelor and Seegars a quick way to assess the performance of the entire business. Because Seegars has 14 branches that run as individual businesses, it used to be that the company had to write company Excel formulas to display company-wide information. With Nowsight, those aggregate numbers are available with the click of a button.

> *I can sit down with a cup of coffee in the morning and in 10 minutes pretty much tell you everything that's going on with the business, all the heavy hitting KPIs, up to the last night's update, which is incredible*
>
> *Ben Seegars, Seegars CEO*

With just a click of a button, Batchelor and Seegars now get a real-time measure of company performance. It's one they can instantly compare with different timeframes – from one day or quarter or year to another – and click back and forth to gauge how individual branches and the company as a whole are doing relative to other time periods.

Another aspect of Nowsight that has been helpful to individual branches is a continuously updated working budget. This helps managers make more informed decisions that take into account the most recent branch expenses and revenues. For example, if a staffer at a branch says a company truck needs a new set of tires, the manager can quickly see what impact that investment would have on the budget. "They can glance at this and say, 'you know what, right now I'm over budget in a lot of areas. I probably don't need something that is non-critical now,'" said Batchelor.

Shared and easily understood information also makes it easy to identify and share best practices between branches. "Our branch managers, it has given them incredible clarity," said Batchelor. "It's not just been saying, 'everybody else is doing it, why aren't you doing it?' They have access to look at the other numbers from their peers and it has promoted an incredible amount of best practices sharing within the company because they're like, 'he's killing it over here and I'm doing terrible. I'm going to call him.'"

A LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIP

Nowsight™

Because she was the one who had to shoulder the burden of consolidating all of the data from multiple Excel spreadsheets from multiple systems into something useful, Veronica Aycock was perhaps the most dubious that Nowsight could deliver what it promised. "I admit that I was skeptical in the beginning," said Aycock. "We have a lot of exceptions between our branches, from different GL (general ledger) formats to vastly different targets and client mixes. I wasn't sure the accuracy or usability was going to be there. I was also worried that the branch managers weren't going to spend time looking at the new Nowsight dashboards."

For many reasons, Aycock is glad that she was wrong. Not only does Nowsight provide accurate and up-to-date data, it is presented in a way that each branch manager and sales person can know where they stand with a quick glance at the screen.

This is no accident. "The human side of data is something we talk about a lot," said Nowsight'sSchader. "Data is great, and the spreadsheets Seegars generated every week had plenty of data points in them. But you have to think about the people who consume the data. What motivates them, what information do they need, and when? That's where Nowsight's combination of on-demand dashboards and automatic morning reports bridges the gap. It's not uncommon for our clients to see significant growth, upwards of 20% after they implement Nowsight."
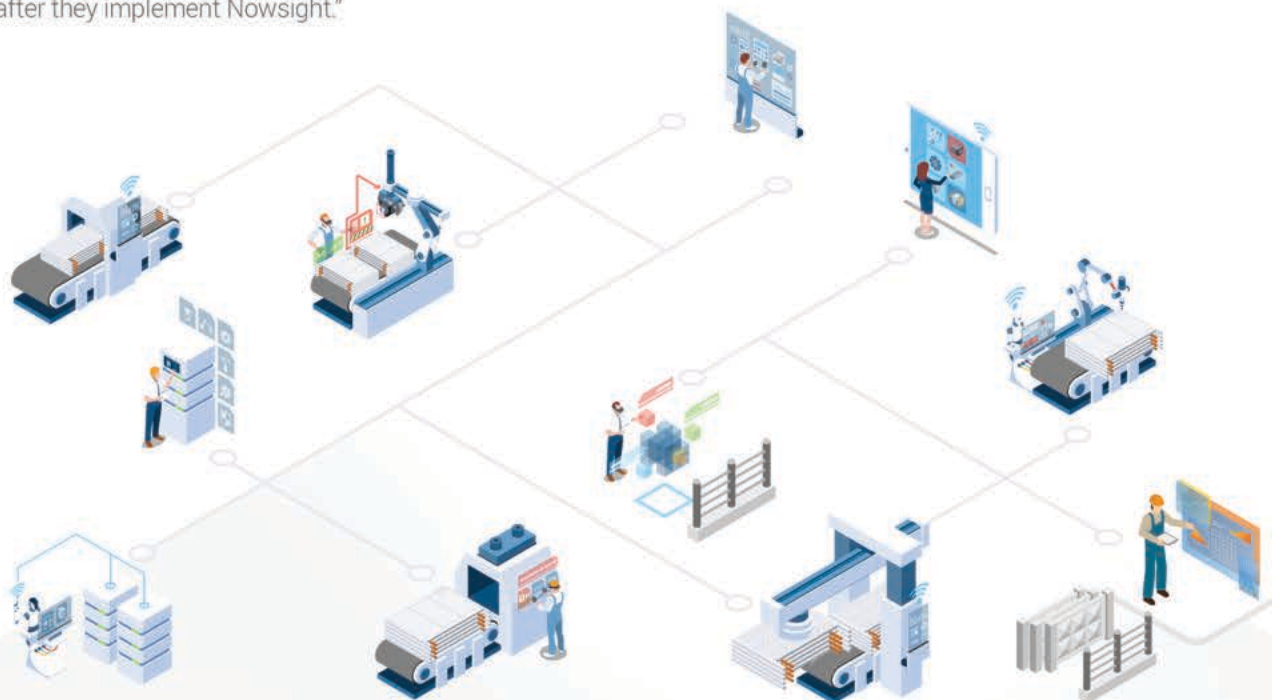
On a more personal level, the implementation of Nowsight has allowed Aycock to spend a lot less time consolidating data and a lot more time pursuing strategic initiatives that benefit Seegars. Going back to the old way of doing things just isn't an option. "They get more information than I ever gave them," said Aycock. "What I did give them was always behind, but it was the best I could do. So if they were ever going to get the information they have now without Nowsight, I'd have to have at least one full-time person."

Because the initial collaboration between Nowsight and Seegars has been such a success, the two companies are looking to deepen their partnership. One aim is to extend the same transparency that has benefitted individual branches to company headquarters in Goldsboro, where custom fencing products are manufactured and shipped out to the installers that build them. Providing continuously updated information about the status of supplies that branches need will help with more precise scheduling, which ultimately translates into happier customers.

"That's going to allow branches to take that information and carry it forward to their customers and schedule better rather than calling a customer after the fact and saying, 'I'm sorry, we're not going to be able to get there today,'" said Batchelor. "It's going to involve monitors throughout our warehouse that show what they're supposed to be working on next in order to keep rhythm with what we're telling our people. It's going to show how far back we're backlogged in certain departments. It's also going to track productivity of our fabricators as they log in and out of working on certain jobs."

This second phase of the partnership between Seegars and Nowsight is only possible because the initial engagement was so successful. It also builds on the impact Nowsight has already had in helping individual locations and employees work smarter and better and also enabling improved collaboration across locations and teams.

For his part, Batchelor is eager to keep building on the momentum of the first phase of the Nowsight and Seegars partnership.

> *I could not imagine going another route, even if given the chance to do it all over again, knowing how productively successful this experience has been. I look forward to a long-term relationship with Nowsight and am excited about what the future holds for Seegars with our newfound horsepower, generated by the Nowsight team."*
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> *Bobby Batchelor, Seegars COO*
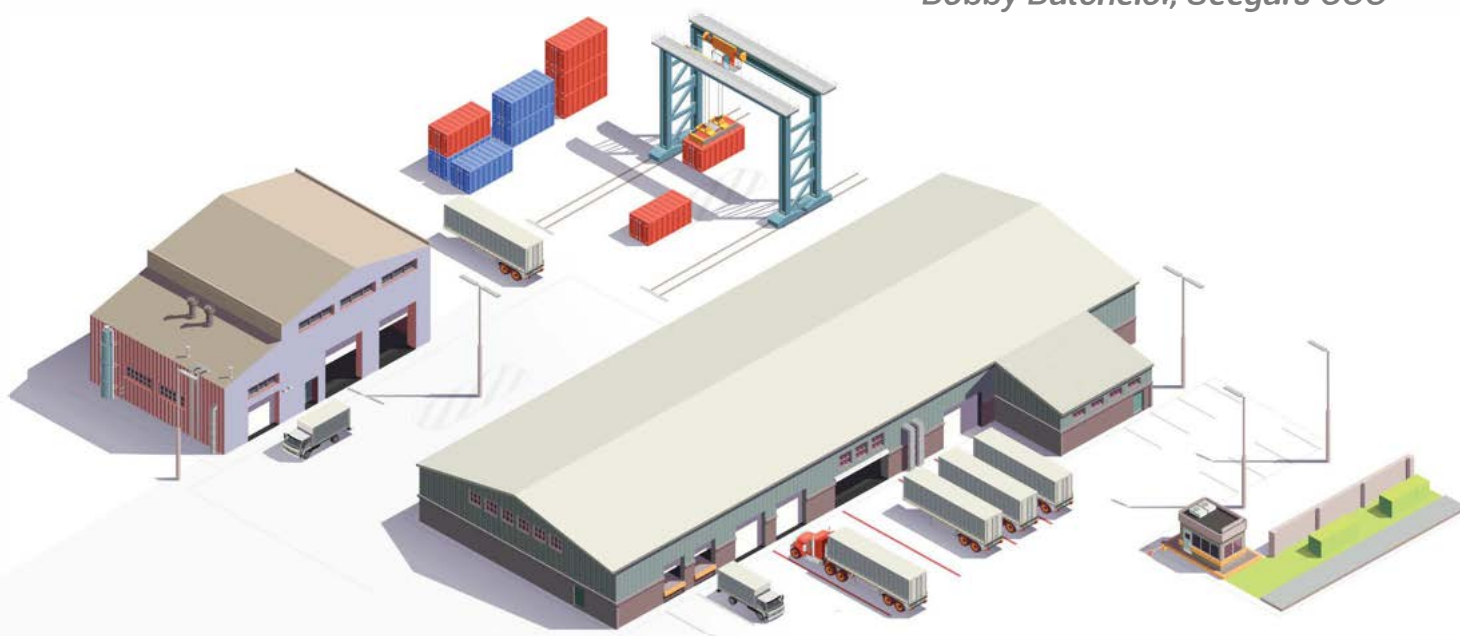
While the value of working with Nowsight is now patently obvious to Aycock, the benefits of the solution really became clear once it was implemented. "It's something we needed for a long time, but we didn't know we needed it," she said. "Whether you have four locations or 44, it's the best and easiest way to keep tabs on what's happening with absolutely current information. I don't know what we'd do without it. It has become such an integrated part of the way we run our business."