

Technology-Empowered Processing Leverages Shop Floor Visibility

Data entry on the shop floor represents the best opportunity for a service center to improve its efficiency and profitability.

Today's steel market is much different than in years past. Work at service centers has become more demanding with higher volumes, tighter shipping schedules and more customer scrutiny. With high-paced, high-stress work environments, the need for efficiency is paramount. But we're all human, and mistakes do happen.

How easy is it to make a mistake at your company? Poorly delegated information can lead to a number of problems that can hurt your business image or, worse yet, cost you money. Traditional data management is no longer keeping up.

Businesses need technology that enables flexibility and adds value to their organizations. Many ERP systems have never moved beyond managing the administrative tasks of the typical service center. The tracking of general ledgers, payroll, inventory and accounting are all done outside of the real operation of the business and managed elsewhere, not within the ERP system. Mistakes are made if there is any potential for different departments to look at different information. A successful company needs strong, uniform data throughout the organization.

The best opportunity for service centers to increase efficiency and improve profitability lies on the shop floor. Shop floor applications lead to better visibility and better automation to deliver significant operational and strategic benefits.

Allowing for data entry at the point of origination is a key feature of new software applications. Shop floor data entry improves the synergies between real-time processes and the accumulation of data for use by other departments. Duplicate and redundant data is eliminated by the system and new data is noted and saved at every level of the business. Data automatically becomes more accurate, increasing the overall productivity, efficiency and visibility of both machine and process performance.

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Additionally, shop floor data entry improves scheduling and utilization of resources to help meet customer demands. Improved visibility and tracking of the entire process from raw material through delivery enhances customer relationships. There is a new sense of accountability now that everyone involved in the business process has access to the same production information.

The most visible changes shop floor applications bring to service centers can be seen inside the warehouse. With the advancement of mobile technology and the increased use of cell phones and tablets, workers can bring computers directly to the inventory. Sales orders and special shipping instructions can be sent digitally to staffers working in the warehouse. This increases the speed and accuracy in which data is transferred between multiple departments and allows for more accurate shipments of the company's products.

A great example of this is zebra barcode scanners. Required inventory is marked with specially formatted barcodes. Inventory inquiries can be assessed by simply scanning the designated tagged item. Sales associates can update an order from their desk and be certain that the update will be reflected on the barcodes in the warehouse.

The addition of shop floor applications in their ERP systems is new for many metal centers, but as more come to understand the benefits, they are embracing the shop floor process and reigniting their companies for the more demanding business environment. ■

Enmark Systems Inc., Ann Arbor, Mich., offers the Eniteo full ERP system designed specifically for metals service centers. For more information, visit www.enmark.com.