



Throughput Consulting, Inc. Article – for Publication

Your technology “cards” – Know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em.

As Kenny Rodgers’ The Gambler plays on the radio in the background, I hear the familiar refrain come in “...You got to know when to hold 'em, know when to fold 'em, Know when to walk away and know when to run...” This gets me thinking about technology and specifically software technology for Metal Treaters.

I’ve worked in software for better than 25 years and I’ve seen LOTS of technology changes. In fact, a tectonic shift in software occurs about every three years. A change so large that much of what a software professional has learned since the last tectonic shift is rendered useless; much of the learning starts all over again like rebuilding so many toppled buildings.

In that light, I look at the basic technology in the metal treating industry and realize it does not really change much at all over time. Changes in metal treating are slow and very evolutionary vs. fast and revolutionary as occurs in software. This hits me as a huge contrast that seems to be missed by many metal treating business owners. In a “universe” where change is slow, it may not be too obvious that there is a segment of your business, software technology, where change can literally occur overnight.

“So what” you may be saying to yourself, “what I installed 10 (or 15) years ago works just fine for us; there is no reason to spend money there.” Or perhaps you just installed some “new” software to run your business, thinking that you have just reset the software technology “clock.” But do you *really* know how modern your software technology is?

Many metal treating companies are running software that was literally written more than a decade ago, using a technology that has been replaced by dramatically better technologies three or four times over at this point. Again, you may be thinking “So what – it does what we need it to do.” Here is where the thinking of many owners is flawed.

Technology CAN and SHOULD be used by your company to give you a strategic advantage over your competitors. Take a look at what percent of your regional marketplace you “own”. If you are a larger than normal metal treater in the Midwest rust-belt, you may have 5% of the marketplace. Let’s say you are very good and control double that – you own 10% of the marketplace. This is certainly a nice place to be, but you are leaving 90% of the marketplace to your competitors! You have massive potential to capture MUCH more of the business – at your competitor’s expense!



“Ok, just how could software allow my company to gain more business?” you ask. There are myriad ways you can leverage new software technology to remove constraints from your bottom line; some direct and some indirect. Let’s look at one possibility: Immediate access to information.

Would it be important for your business to free up strategic employees’ time so they can focus on important activities instead of chasing down the status of jobs, or looking for job-related paperwork, multiple times during the day? Why not empower your **employees and customers** to “pull” the information about jobs when THEY need it?

Allow ALL – not some – of your employees access to the information they need about the job(s) they are working on the instant they need it. Can any of your employees walk up to a shop floor terminal and determine what job(s) they should be working on? Can they access photos, purchase orders, packing lists, CAD drawings, and instructional videos, detailed processing specifications or historical part information (like past tempering results) on the production floor? Do they ALWAYS have all information they need to guarantee they process the job properly to dramatically increase your quality and reduce rework or scrapped parts? Can you access your company’s software system from home, at a hotel or in front of your customer as easily as you can from your desk?

How about allowing your customer to see where his/her Job is in real-time? Give your customers access to certifications, invoices, payments, furnace charts and complete processing history of their parts. You will build a much stronger relationship with your customers and will move from vendor status to partner status. Can you imagine the sales advantage you would have when courting new customers and retaining existing customers? Your competitors could not provide the same level of service and therefore would be at a huge disadvantage. Let your competitors lower their prices – the customers you want are ones that appreciate the partner collaboration and see MORE value in your service and are willing to pay for it.

This is just a small sample of strategic advantages new software technology can give your company. We are ALL looking for ways to improve our bottom lines, just remember to consider your software technology when looking for ways to improve business. If you don’t believe me, then at least listen to Kenny...”Ev’ry gambler knows that the secret to survivin’ Is knowin’ what to throw away and knowing what to keep. ‘Cause ev’ry hand’s a winner and ev’ry hand’s a loser... But in his final words I found an ace that I could keep.”

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