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STRANDED NO MORE

Bridging Your Islands of Information

It starts at the entrance to your plant. From your time clock to the wash aisle, from the soiled sort to shipping, everything in your laundry is becoming automated. Your company has spent countless dollars and time bringing in the latest and greatest equipment and route accounting systems, each one making available a plethora of information. Life as a manager couldn't be easier, right?

Wrong! Even with all of this automation, you have production managers walking the floor with clipboards gathering stats, numbers, and reports from each little "island of information." As if this wasn't time consuming enough, now you have to figure out what to do with everything that has been collected. Then you have to assign the new task to your most valued office personnel to pick and choose information, compiling it into reports that are vital to the everyday management of your business. When all of this is said and done, you can finally analyze the reports to see problems that occurred days and maybe even a week ago. By this time, the consequences of these problems may have already been felt in your plant through unnecessary overtime and excess labor or even worse, your customers may have felt the consequences through undelivered product.

There has got to be a better way to monitor your business and tie all of these “islands of information” together, allowing you to make informed decisions to improve your operations in a more timely manner. After all, you can’t control market pricing and labor wage increases, but you can control your production costs and therefore increase your bottom line.

The Solution

Many modern laundries worldwide are discovering that with a good production and management software package, they can bridge all of their equipment and work spots together, whether the work spots are old or new, automated or manual. When locations are connected, information can then be viewed and utilized from one convenient location, eliminating the time consuming and inaccurate method of manual gathering. This type of software can do more than just communicate with work spots, it also can tie in time and attendance functions with your production floor. This allows you to view your staffing, equipment, and production performance all at once in real time. You actually have the ability to monitor production flow, output, costs, accurate standards for future planning, and schedules to achieve optimal production results at the lowest possible cost to your company. You can also choose from hundreds of reports to meet the specific needs of your laundry and easily export them to payroll or spreadsheets for further use.

Production and management software is also a vital partner to Account Profitability programs. Accounts that looked unprofitable may not have been turned away if the production floor was running more efficiently. If every step in your production cycle is running optimally, processing difficult accounts becomes much easier, meaning that you are that far ahead of your lesser informed competitors.

The Function

The most effective and efficient software for production should have at least the following functions:

Time and Attendance—The production system should be able to replace the standard time clock in your plant; not a must, but a good start to cutting costs. From the time that your employees clock in, the work spot location and production of each individual employee can be monitored and managed. An employee can even move from one work spot to another and be tracked accordingly. With the coupling of an employee to the specific work spot, an employee can be located immediately without disrupting workflow. Also, productivity tracking for bonuses and incentives becomes a breeze. All of this information can then be exported through a standard interface to your current payroll system without the need for manual re-entry of the data.

Staff Planning—Employee availability and skill-set information, together with a standard planning template, make predicting and planning the production staff for future days and weeks very simple. With the information concerning productivity for each employee, you have the basis for sending your staff to the right work spot every time. Use past experiences with individuals and with department staffing to help you plan for the future. The employee swipes their time card in the morning and immediately sees the work spot that they are assigned to for that day. Not only can you save time on your planning process, but you can also gain more efficient use of your workforce.

Online Production Recording—This can be accomplished through three different work spot interfaces: 1) PC communication, 2) PLC interfacing, or 3) a proprietary communication device. Each method depends on the age and type of the equipment and the level of automation of the work spot. Just about any type of work spot can be brought online. When the interface is set up, data

can be gathered at time intervals that you dictate. Intervals of 3–5 minutes are most common, as they tend to create a monitoring level that is close to real time. The result is the ability to monitor production levels and flow for every work spot in your facility on one computer screen that replicates your production floor. You can actually see the bottlenecks in your production as they occur, allowing you to make adjustments when they can most affect your production. Think of the money and hassles that you can save if you can fix a problem as it happens instead of several days later.

Productivity Measurement—With the ability to see each employee’s work spot location and the ability to monitor production levels, the obvious next step is to measure the productivity of your employees and equipment. This can be done by machine, by work spot, or by employee. You can set the production norms and measure productivity against them, allowing you to identify the most productive employees for each work spot. You can then use this function, coupled with time and attendance, to track, process, and export bonus or incentive information directly to payroll. The possibilities for increasing individual productivity are endless and the ability to make informed decisions on new equipment purchases becomes apparent.

Bench Marking—Multiple location laundries can realize the benefits of comparing the productivity and production results of each one of their plants. Viewing of each production floor can be done at the Corporate Office of the business. Best practices can then be shared between the plant managers, thus giving all of their facilities the best possible results with the lowest possible costs.

The Result

Controlling production and labor online directly affects cost and, in turn, profitability. With a good production and management system, these areas are linked directly to each other. You can use this system to plan, monitor, and control operations and the use of human and equipment resources. At any time, you can see what you have accomplished, where you are, and what remains to be completed. You assign the resources as you see fit. You determine the production and costs that you incur. You directly control costs and profitability as resources are expended, in real time. You bridge your “islands of information” and the result is to increase your bottom line.

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