

Software improves estimating, job creation processes

This Indianapolis company uses estimating and job creation software to streamline its bidding process and increase efficiency.

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plant facts

Masco Support Services

Indianapolis, Ind.

- ☛ **Plant size:** 52,000 square feet
- ☛ **Number of employees:** 30
- ☛ **Product:** Tradeshow exhibits and point of purchase displays for Masco companies

Jeff Slinker remembers the bad old days of project estimating. When Slinker began his job as a project estimator at Masco Support Services, he did everything by hand and kept all of his paper records in files.

"It was a constant phone call," he says. "I had to call everybody to get a price on something. If I didn't call them, I'd have to go back to a folder to look for a price that I'd gotten on something before."

Slinker has been in the trade show industry since 1988. He has worked on almost every facet of creating trade show displays and point of purchase displays — from building displays to running the shop and from project management to project estimating. Slinker says he was excited to get the job when he was promoted to estimator, but he wanted to have an organized way of doing it. He began the job with a pencil, some paper and a calculator. Then he received a demo CD of TradeSoft Inc.'s ProjectPak estimating software from a colleague.

Masco Support Services purchased the software after Slinker and his supervisor attended IWF 2000 and listened to user reviews. Slinker and Masco also decided to become beta users for TradeSoft's ShopPak software.

ProjectPak is a software package designed for custom manufacturers who want to streamline their estimating and bidding process. It can manage the flow of information throughout each stage of a job, from estimating to quote generation to job costing and project management.

What's produced

Indianapolis-based Masco Support Services, a subsidiary of Delta Faucet Co., exists mainly to support Masco companies by manufacturing trade show exhibits and point of purchase displays. The company also does a small amount of outside work for other trade show companies that are overloaded with work.

"Personnel on the floor are familiar with how to make both trade show displays and point of purchase displays. It's a fabrication process but it's kind of like being in two different businesses," says Slinker.

Two types of jobs

Slinker explains that Masco Support Services encounters two types of jobs on a day-to-day basis. Time and materials, or T and M, is one type of job. "There's no time for an estimate.

continued



Masco Support Services produces tradeshow exhibits and point-of-purchase displays for Masco Companies.

FDM software

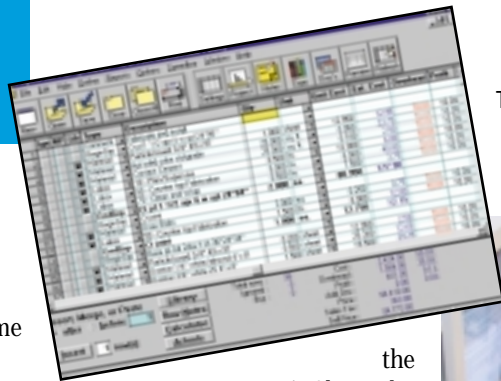
The customer wants it now. Boom. Lets get it done." As the name implies, the customer is charged for time and materials, no questions asked.

The majority of Masco Support Services' jobs are production jobs. "With production jobs account managers will write up a request and they use the estimate document in ProjectPak. They put in the information and their notes tell me what they want."

To create his estimate from the account managers' information, Slinker draws from a large library of information that has been created over the year and a half Masco Support Services has been using ProjectPak. The library includes pricing information, material costs and time estimates from previous jobs.

The company also uses ProjectPak to track its jobs. At any time, Slinker and colleagues can run a report that tells the status of the job. They always know whether the job is in estimating, in pending, in production or T and M production.

After Slinker has finished estimating the job, he puts it in pending status and the account managers forward the estimate to their client. Once the estimate is approved, then the job is released back to Masco Support Services to do the purchasing. Also, once the job is sold to the client, it is converted over to



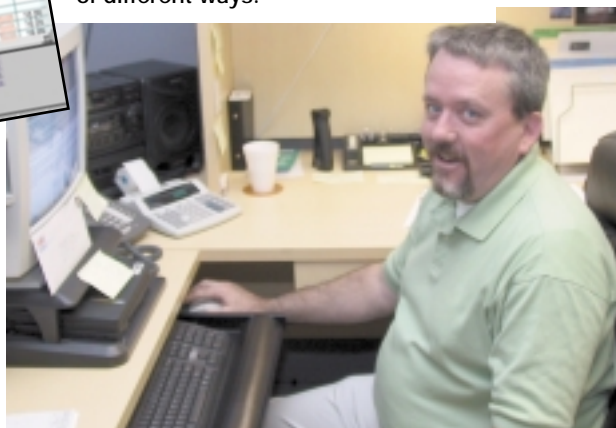
This screenshot gives a view of how ProjectPak looks to the user. Needed information can be culled in a variety of different ways.

the company's ShopPak software.

ShopPak works in tandem with ProjectPak, says Slinker. It was designed for ProjectPak job conversion, ProjectPak integration, work order generation, job tracking, job costing, purchasing, inventory, shipping and receiving. Modules can be added for shop floor data collection, scheduling, accounting links and CAD and engineering links.

Information can be transferred easily from ProjectPak to ShopPak, says Slinker. In ShopPak, the Purchase Order Builder allows the company's purchasing agent to click and drag information from the estimate to create the job. "The information comes out of the library; it already has the vendor in there and already has the prices in there and he can print out a P.O."

ShopPak shows Slinker and his colleagues recent purchases on items from vendors and what was paid for the items. "It gives you better buying power because you're looking at what you've paid for things in the past," he says. "You can get better price breaks, so it's a really good tool for purchasing."



Jeff Slinker, estimator at Masco Support Services, was excited to be promoted into his position, but he wanted an organized way to do the job, he says.

As beta users of ShopPak, Slinker and his colleagues have helped in revising the software over the past year. The group enjoyed the process because they have been able to help tailor the software to better fit their business and other companies involved in custom manufacturing.

On the shop floor

To use ProjectPak and ShopPak on the floor, Slinker set up a number of stations around the plant called tricoders. "We created stations out there. The work orders go out. All the operation codes are bar coded so when a guy gets a work order, he scans it.

"A worker scans his name in and



Masco Support Services is a subsidiary of Delta Faucet Co. Many of the exhibits the company makes are for Delta Faucet displays at The Great Indoors stores.



To use TradeSoft's ShopPak software, Masco Support Services installed bar code scanning stations called Tricoders for employees to track what they are working on.

scans his operation code and he's into that job," says Slinker. "When he gets ready to change jobs, he goes back over and scans it. The guys use it all day long. They use it for a time clock and for job time accounting."

To create the point of purchase displays and the trade show exhibits, melamine is usually milled on a Schelling panel saw or a Komo router, depending on the size of part needed. Some of the routed or cut items are edged on a Brandt edgebander. "Then we set up our line and usually do our assembly. A lot of our POP work is just not straight cut assembly. It's some custom type work too," says Slinker.

At the end of every workday, a third shift worker comes in and downloads the tricolors. This takes the information from the tricolors and puts it into ShopPak. Then a report is printed.

With those reports, Slinker and his colleagues know what jobs were worked on, what customers the jobs were for, what the transactions were and dates and times the employees worked on the jobs.

Human error occasionally is a factor. For example, sometimes workers forget to use the barcode scanner to note when they ended a job. This means that sometimes the reports need to be corrected.

"Once the production manager makes the corrections, he does an update and it puts all of that information



TradeSoft's ProjectPak software helps Masco Support Services estimate the time and materials it will take to create point-of-purchase displays such as these.

into ShopPak. Then you go through and approve the time cards and the operations. From that point it goes out to the individual jobs," says Slinker.

The learning curve

Learning the software was relatively easy, says Slinker. ProjectPak includes three manuals — a quick start manual, a book of examples about how to use the software and a general software manual. "I learned ProjectPak by sitting here with a manual at my desk. It's pretty easy though."

With ShopPak, Russ Wheelock, president of Tradesoft, flew in and trained the workers on how to use the tricolors.

There are many benefits of using software over manual project estimating, says Slinker. "The biggest benefit is having a database and record of what you've done previously.

"Just the fact that ProjectPak has your customers in here, your vendors in here, it has all your phone numbers and your materials. It has the library. It tracks by what we do department wise, and it allows you to keep record of dollar amounts that you've done on this side of the business."

The software also speeds up estimating, says Slinker. It minimizes the busy work and it takes away the redundancies of the old method.

For the workers, Masco Support Services is also better able to break down the jobs, says Slinker. "The guys are better informed about how much time they have to do things. By breaking it down by the different operations, we're able to see if I'm giving them enough time."

Slinker says it's vital that the people on the shop floor clock in on the jobs because it helps him see how he's performing as an estimator. "That's the only way you have of gauging if you're getting your numbers right."

ProjectPak and ShopPak help Slinker determine which employee is most skilled at what job. "If you're making pods day in and day out, you can see where you're coming out and who's the best person and where he fits best."

The software also makes the em-



This Komo router is used to rout parts for Masco Support Services' point-of-purchase and tradeshow displays.

ployees better informed, says Slinker. "I think it gives them a better picture of the overall job. It allows you to put the job out there in more of a package rather than saying, 'here you go do this, you go do that.'"

Most importantly, ProjectPak and ShopPak are enabling Masco Support Services to become a more efficient organization. The company has been using the software for a year and a half, and it's taken a while to build up the library of information, says Slinker.

Now that the company has this powerful tool, it is beginning to greatly increase its efficiency. "The longer we use it, the more it's going to help." ▲

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