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# Every Window is Special

and deserves the optimum  
software solution

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Fig 1: Theory: Abacus for window producers?

Window producers of various sizes have realised the importance of a modern, comprehensive software system for the optimum control of both commercial and production processes. Still it seems as if the investment cost for software is so much more crucial than for a new machine. However if the software is used to its best effect, the investment in specialised software generally pays off very quickly.

Machinery, windows, doors, lorries, and production space: all this is tangible and “real”. You can look at it and judge whether it may be an advantage. A new lorry or processing centre can be presented to others with the price of possession. Software, on the contrary, is invisible, glimpses can be seen on monitors and it is hard to judge if a certain software solution may give you an advantage, and to which extent.

The first question is whether it has to be specialised software in the first place; there are so many suppliers of standard ERP systems, available for all and sundry, which have been sold thousands of times to all sorts of producers, service companies, administrations, and institutes. The answer is straightforward: The window and door industry generally differs

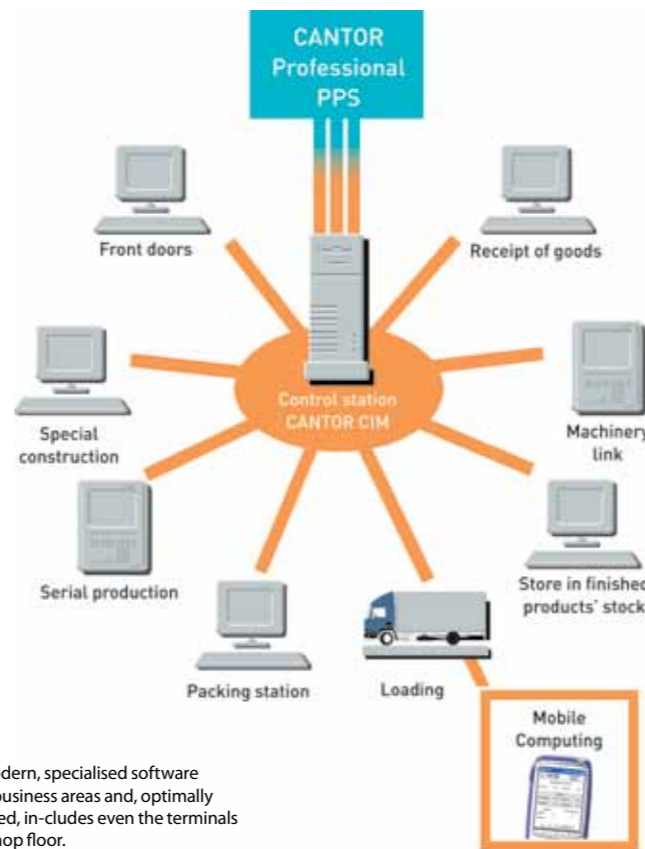


Fig 2: Modern, specialised software links all business areas and, optimally configured, in-cludes even the terminals on the shop floor.

from many other industries in the enormous diversity of products and product variants. A standard ERP system which can handle the complex bill of material of a vehicle does not have to be able to describe a window properly, or is it possible to just order a vehicle that is four inches longer than usual? Or order a freely defined shape? Rigid bill of material concepts do not suit the window and door industry. This does not only apply to the configurator. The special requirements of the window and door industry also have their effects on production, purchasing, inventory, and dispatch. The entire process including every single detail. Only specialised software will be able to fulfil the particular requirements of this industry: a fully comprehensive solution that allows for the special requirements, on all levels and in all areas of a window and door producing company.

But: which advantages are to be gained by investing in software? Is it advisable to invest in software at all?

A theoretical experiment: Just imagine you want to eliminate the IT cost of your company by getting rid of the entire IT. This saves a lot of money because you can let your IT team go. Maybe you can go and buy an abacus for the members of your staff – a wooden frame with balls mounted on it in order for it to be used for calculations – invented thousands of years ago, and still in use on the market places in several countries. And the effects? You would have to hire a large number of new employees to cope with your daily business; you would lose track of things, the quality would deteriorate, and you might not be able to stick to delivery dates as required. In all probability, your company would be ruined within a short time.

This experiment shows: No IT equals lots of personnel, no transparency, no sticking to delivery dates, loss of quality. No company in this industry can exist without IT. What does it mean if instead, you spend more money on IT, if you actually invest in an IT project, with clearly defined, realistic targets? What would be achieved by doing this?

The answer has as many facets as there are companies in this industrial sector. All of them are using IT systems, but in different ways. Every company starts from a different, individual point. The same can be said for the targets. These depend on the company size, the product range, automation of production,

qualification of staff, and of course on the sales channels.

Do you create paper files for your customers which are then passed from office to office, through production planning, purchasing, invoicing? Do you copy stacks of papers, and distribute them on the shop floor? Do you issue general delivery dates (e.g. today plus two weeks)? Do you calculate by hand the products to be purchased? Do you check invoices by

hand? These are just some examples. perhaps you should go over all processes in your company checking whether they are run efficiently. What happens for example when a customer calls to change an ongoing order? How long does it take you to know the current state of the order, have the parts been ordered already? Has production started? Has the glass been delivered and fitted? A good data processing (DP) system will provide correct answers to these questions, within seconds,



Dr. Ralf Muehlhans ensuring everything goes according to plan



and at any terminal in your company the order entry personnel can just select the case and then see all the required information from all areas, on screen, including all the production steps on the shop floor and the shipping information. No searching for files, no phoning of colleagues and no long walks around the machinery to check on the state of affairs.

Today, considering an investment in DP is often connected with paperless production. This is an important development and has many advantages; the DP system however has to be capable of much more than "only" paperless production. This is all about control, buffer management, remakes, etc. But investing only in this area, leaving the administration work i.e. order entry, purchasing, production planning, dispatch, and invoicing, anything less than optimally, is not enough. Both parts have to be matched and both have to be as efficient and transparent as possible.

Take a close look at your organisation. Surely you will detect many things which can be automated, simplified, and rendered more reliable by means of an optimised organisation and DP. Of course it is sometimes hard to assess

this because one does not know exactly just what a good DP solution is capable of these days. One option is to ask a renowned software supplier to take a close look around your organisation in order to point out the potential. You should however verify his statement! Let

him show and prove to you that the software he is offering can actually do what he claims it can do, check his references with other companies where a similar solution has been implemented.

If your business is already optimally organised, and you are using a DP system to best effect, the result of such a visit can only be the software supplier congratulating you on your organisation. A change to another IT system will hardly bring any advantages in this case. If there is something to improve however, it is worth considering and discussing the facts. An investment in DP and in good organisation can be more profitable, even if the cost is the same, than investing in new machinery. It is worth thinking about this, and seriously considering a change for the better.

Stagnation in connection with DP is an impossible thing. The technology of databases and operating systems, the networking with suppliers, etc. proceeds with breathtaking speed and offers a number of considerable advantages for those companies who use it.

Even the product range changes with incredible speed, and production automation is permanently progressing. It is therefore vital to choose the right partner: a partner who can keep up with the speed of these changes, and who invests in the constant innovation of his software. Tackle the subject of data processing for your company – it will pay you handsomely.



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