

Management Consultants to the Precast Industry

RESULTS IMPROVEMENT BULLETIN

PRECAST BUSINESS RESULTS IMPROVEMENT BULLETIN

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MORE VALUE FROM YOUR INVESTMENT IN DESKTOP TECHNOLOGY

This month's Results Improvement Bulletin is provided by John Chandler, President, Alandale Training. Alandale provides customized on-site training to improve productivity through better use of Microsoft Office products.

MJS Management Services collaborates with specialists such as Alandale to provide high quality and innovative solutions for our precast clients.

BACKGROUND

This bulletin provides suggestions on how to gain more value from your investment in desktop and related technology.

Precast producers, like most businesses, have invested heavily in desktop technology - the norm is a computer on every desk, PDA's, and other devices with associated software, internet access, servers, and networks. The goal is to drive business productivity, however costs are high because the technology industry operates on a model where equipment and software becomes obsolete and requires upgrading on a 3-5 year cycle.

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Solutions such as Microsoft Office are intended to improve efficiency yet, due to a lack of knowledge, the capabilities of these programs are often underutilized.

Almost anyone can start up a word processing program like Microsoft Word and create a document. Yet, with inadequate knowledge, an email or letter that should only take 5 to 10 minutes to create might take the untrained user several times as long.

Examples Where Technology Value is Not Fully Realized

All Microsoft Office programs

- **Templates.** For files that are used frequently, such as monthly reports or expense reports, many users open the last file, delete unneeded content and then save the file as a copy before creating their newest version. Not only is it inefficient to delete the content from the previous version each time but it is also error-prone: forgetting to save as a copy and saving instead will over-write the previous version.
- **Shared files.** In recent versions of Office, Microsoft has increased the capability to share documents and to capture comments and changes of several reviewers in one file. These often underutilized features speed communication and reduce the hunt for information that is common in a precast environment.

Excel

- **Export data from another application** such as accounting, and import it into Excel. Use the product's analysis features such as Pivot Tables and database functions to extract useful information.
- **Linked spreadsheets.** Reuse your data rather than re-keying or copying it. Have a summary spreadsheet that summarizes data from several detailed files. Each time you open the summary file it is updated with current data from the underlying files.

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PowerPoint

- Consistent, simple slide layout. PowerPoint can be a very effective communication tool yet, used incorrectly, it can become a barrier to communication. If overdone, the many features you can use to enhance and reinforce your message instead become a distraction for the audience.
- Multimedia. PowerPoint makes it easy to include pictures, clipart, sound and video in a presentation.

Email

- Of all the Office applications, Outlook is likely the easiest to use without training as creating, sending, reading and printing mail are all relatively intuitive. As with most Windows programs, shortcuts are available to make these features even easier and quicker to use. Given the volume of mail many employees deal with, these time-savers can result in noticeable productivity gains.
- Calendar. Beyond maintaining your schedule electronically and synchronizing it with a PDA such as a Palm, Outlook's meetings function can significantly reduce the effort it takes to schedule internal meetings. You can check invitee's schedules to see when everyone is available and then invite them. You can even book meeting rooms and other resources such as projectors by "inviting" them to the meeting.

Word

- Basic formatting skills. What do you do if you have keyed text in lowercase and want to change the case to uppercase? Rather than use the Change Case command, some users delete and retype the text in uppercase.
- With easy access to the Internet and the falling price of digital cameras, pictures are increasingly being used in documents. Word makes it easy to control the position of the picture in a document and to specify how text wraps around the picture. However, without this knowledge working with pictures in documents can be frustrating.

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Conclusion

Many organizations underutilize the capabilities of the technology they've spent money on. From the perspective of companies using lean management principles or from a productivity improvement viewpoint, under-using technology creates waste.

Training can increase the return on your investment in IT infrastructure. Customized, targeted training sessions that efficiently use employee time often provide the best value for your training dollar. Some examples:

Executives

- One-on-one. Cover only the material you want at a pace that suits you. Focus on topics/ shortcuts to increase your productivity.

Specific groups

- Classroom sessions. Content can be tailored to the needs of specific groups such as production or field personnel.

Topics applicable to a wide audience

- Tips & Tricks: Time-savers for Word, Excel or Outlook, a 60 to 90 minute presentation can be an effective way to reach a large group. These Tips & Tricks sessions are ideal for self-taught users or those who have not attended a course in a while. Everyone receives a Quick Reference Guide with step-by-step instructions on the material covered.

Contact MJS Management for more information on improving the return on your technology investment.