

Cimulus software boosts efficiencies on shop floors

A software package designed by **Cimulus**, an Ann Arbor-based software development company, can help increase efficiencies in shop floor processes.

DataCenter collects, gathers, and manages information – such as cycle counts, start and stop times, and job numbers – directly from the shop floor and sends it up to the front office, bridging the gap that’s created by front-office software systems that are incompatible with shop floor operations.

“Our approach is to say, let’s treat (the shop floor) like the critical part of your business that it really is,” said **Dennis Carmichael**, president of Cimulus.

“You’ve got the front office and you’ve got the floor, and it’s important to think of them as two halves of your company working together rather than manufacturing kind-of just supporting your sales efforts,” he explained.

The software was developed several years ago, but it’s only been available as a product for a little over a year, Carmichael said. Cimulus’ DataCenter clients include Ann Arbor-based Edwards Brothers Inc. and Ann



FACTORY FLOOR

Jennifer Daniel Szymanski

Arbor-based Precisia LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Flint Ink Corp.

And it’s a growing part of Cimulus’ business. In 2004, DataCenter jobs accounted for about 25-30 percent of its business. This year, Carmichael said it should account for at least half of the company’s business.

DataCenter can be configured to fit processes that are usually unique to an individual shop floor. “We just recognized from the outset that whatever it is you’re doing on your floor, presumably nobody else is doing it quite like you are,” said Carmichael.

Chances are, you want to work efficiently but you don’t want to have to change the processes that you’ve figured out over time, he said.

Implementing the software into a site is a two-step process. First,

Cimulus looks at the existing processes and sequences to find out what can be automated. Then, the software is configured and employees are shown how to use it. “We usually take a train-the-trainers approach,” said Carmichael.

The software cuts out several steps. Instead of filling out a form with an employee’s ID and job number, as well as start, stop, and lunch times every time they change jobs, employees simply swipe their badge, pick up the job sheet and a scanner and scan the item. “The whole use of technology has really just been with efficiency and accuracy,” said Carmichael.

“You’ve got press guys there that are just geniuses at getting stuff up and running,” he said. “You want to have those employees doing something that (they’re) valuable at, rather than writing stuff down.”

The investment cost for DataCenter ranges according to the size of the facility. About half the cost is software and half the cost is hardware. Thus, a larger facility may require more hardware, although the software cost will remain about the same. Generally speaking, a typical

investment is between \$25,000 and \$75,000, said Carmichael.

DataCenter is similar to the ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning software) system commonly used in the front office, said Carmichael.

The main difference between an ERP system and DataCenter is the customization. Front office systems generally are designed for standard office procedures, such as invoicing. “For the most part, every company sends invoices roughly the same way or takes orders the same way,” said Carmichael.

“With manufacturers, though, on the shop floor and the actual production aspect of their business, that’s usually where they’re doing things in a unique way,” he said. “A lot of the time, that’s usually where the competitive advantage is.”

Cimulus was founded in 1992 by Dennis Carmichael and Wes Faler. In addition to working with manufacturers, the company also does custom development for private industry and the U.S. government. It employs eight people.

■ *Jennifer Daniel Szymanski can be reached at 734-302-1721 or jszymanski@mbizreview.com.*