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Cutting The Cord: Mobilizing Manufacturing Intelligence



When it comes to manufacturing, digestible insight for operations performance generally means being chained to a desk. That's because in the past, accessing information on the go was accomplished either a) on a small smartphone screen where data was hard to sift through or b) on a laptop that had to be lugged across a manufacturing floor.

However, the rise of the tablet—specifically, the iPad—has been a game changer. With constant Web connection, long battery life, and instant “on,” the iPad is the perfect piece of hardware to put into the hands of key executives. But what about software functionality? With expensive legacy software that usually requires intensive customization for on-the-go computing, how can the iPad be utilized? The answer: an application built specifically for the iPad that delivers real-time operations metrics and insight.

A New Way to Navigate

Apple claims that more than 65% of Fortune 100 companies have deployed or piloted the device. But why is this? Tablets have been around for a while, but never gained momentum. And the iPad has largely been positioned as a consumer device rather than a business tool. So what's the iPad's secret for business? It lies in the fact that the iPad's operating system provides a new way to touch applications and manipulate data. Gone are the days where people are stuck navigating through screens or menus with a mouse or stylus. And when squeezing insight and meaning out of every piece of data adds up to reduced costs, improved throughput, and ultimately greater profitability, the iOS approach can make a world of difference.

Take a manufacturing company, for example, with global facilities: how do operations management and senior executives quickly drill down to the latest production runs for a given line or machine at a glance? Enter the iPad. While there are plenty of cases where an iPad has been used on the manufacturing floor to keep track of tactical functions, it can be even more powerful when put in the hands of management looking for every strategic advantage they can use to boost the bottom line. That's where business intelligence comes into play.

Yet one of the biggest challenges with most business intelligence programs is that the very data and detail that make them so powerful also make them complex. For example, data from various locations may not be centralized, making performance comparisons between different manufacturing sites a time-consuming task. But the same design that makes consuming media on an iPad so simple and intuitive also makes it possible to drill rapidly into the latest data sets, and can even make slicing and dicing data fun.

Getting Executives Involved

This new way of interacting with data has transformed the way manufacturing companies do business. In

most situations, gleaning meaning from details takes time that senior executives just can't afford, and so all they're left with is summary data, which by definition doesn't give the whole story. Yet the iPad's ability to make unfiltered, real-time information readily consumable also eliminates the need for interpretation or summarization, giving executives an accurate, undiluted view of every aspect of operations.

By enabling this formerly counterintuitive level of detail, executives now have the ability to understand real-time performance, and ask direct, specific questions. This both aids insight and speeds decision-making. In the end, it can mean almost instantly pinpointing problems and acting on them strategically—eliminating the guesswork and the “someone look into this and report back to me...”

Bottom-Line Benefits

Ultimately this means fewer resources needed to diagnose a problem as well as improved efficiencies across an enterprise. For example, a manufacturing enterprise using a business intelligence app for the iPad increased capacity by 25% in less than four months. The reason? The operations management team and senior executives—all the way up to the C-suite—have meaningful data in their hands that gives them visual insight to tackle tough problems and propagate best practices.

Simply put, the iPad can help to enable a better bottom line for manufacturers. Using the tablet with the right business software can shape management's behavior and approach to problem-solving. By doing this, executives have a more immediate and meaningful impact on reducing cost and improving productivity—solving problems strategically, not just tactically at the plant level. So go ahead, don't be afraid to grab the latest data. Literally.

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