

DATABASE BY DESIGN, INC.

Growing Your Business Without Growing Your Staff

How to automate your business tasks with a powerful database

Is your business as efficient as it can be? - How many times do your staff members say, "There just isn't enough time in the day to do all the tasks that need to be done."? This can be especially troubling in slow economic times when you can't afford to hire additional people to handle the work. Instead, create an information management system (also referred to as a customized database) to do your work. It will complete all of those tedious tasks and you won't have to send out biweekly paychecks or expend money on employment taxes.

Efficiency Checklist - Do you need to create a new or upgrade your existing information management system? If you answer yes to any of the following questions, then you have found an opportunity to become more efficient.

- √ Are you still receiving orders or tracking processes with pencil and paper?
- √ If you have an information management system, are people manually entering the same information into more than one system?
- √ If a customer calls to determine the status of an order, does a service representative have to ask to call the customer back, so that he can track down the status of the order?
- √ After an order is entered into your database, is it printed onto paper and walked to the next phase of production?
- √ Do you purge old data from your database in order to prevent it from slowing down?
- √ Are your customers asking to enter their orders themselves via the Internet, but your web site does not contain that capability?

Here are some examples of tasks that could be automated:

- Production scheduling
- Shipping manifest generation
- Invoice creation
- Alerts to notify you when to order new supplies
- E-mail or fax of invoice
- Management and accounting reporting
- Marketing system to gain new clients
- Work flow organizer/planner
- Order entry by the customer via a web page
- E-mail or fax proofs or product designs to customer for approval
- Transfer of information between multiple systems (i.e. accounting programs, production systems, client management systems, human resource systems, etc.)
- Document management system

'Mission: NOT-Impossible' - If you have identified some inefficiencies in your organization, then how can you automate it? Just remember this simple concept:

If you can write a step-by-step guide for the task, then you can automate it.

No matter how many steps are needed to make such a guide, these steps can be used by a database programmer to create a system to automate the process. This results in the automation of routine and redundant tasks by a system that can perform them quickly.

Perhaps you hesitate to automate a task because there are exceptions to the rules defined in the step-by-step guide. Most situations follow an 80-20 rule: Your step-by-step guide will be valid for 80% of the time, but will need modification for the 20% of exceptions. That doesn't mean that the guides used are ineffective. Even though automation of 80% of the work can have a significant impact on efficiency in your organization, it's important to address the remaining 20%. The same answer applies to this issue: If you can write a step-by-step guide for the exceptions, then you can automate it.

Automation = Benefits Galore! - Once you have your work flow process automated, you can start reaping the benefits of having all this information readily available, and nicely organized. Realize these benefits by implementing a database system in your organization:

Benefit 1 - Increased Accuracy, Reduced Paperwork and Typing: By having one system that is integrated throughout the production process, mistakes are minimized because the information is only keyed in once at the start. You could also eliminate keystroke errors by having the customer enter the order directly into your system through a database driven web site made especially for receiving orders.

Benefit 2 - Enhanced Customer Service: Instead of telling your customers that their order is “in process”, your service personnel can tell the customer the exact status of the order, and the estimated ship date. You could even have your database publish order status on your web site so that the customer can check on the status at any time. Your information management system can also help you prevent order delays. For instance, you can be notified when production of an order is about to fall behind schedule. Your system could also provide information to help you schedule your production in the most efficient manner.

Benefit 3 - Proactive Management of Production/Service: If you implement a system that coordinates each step involved in creating your service or product, management gains information pertinent to the work flow. You can then use this data to analyze areas for improvement. A better understanding of the use of resources can help you become more profitable.

Benefit 4 - Improved Cash Flow: Once an order is identified as being finished, shipping information should be generated and invoicing information should be initiated. Shipping reports can be generated to help reduce shipping costs by identifying optimized packaging options. When possible, an electronic version of the invoice can be sent to the customer. Cash flow is enhanced because costs are reduced and the invoice is in the hands of the customer immediately after shipment, which reduces the amount of time until payment is received. You can get a better handle on your receivables by having your system alert you when customers are stretching out their payment schedule beyond your stated terms.

Benefit 5 - More Time for Employees to Perform Essential Tasks: If your employees are freed from frustrating tasks, they can spend more of their time servicing clients and building the business. Production of your product is accelerated as busy paperwork is eliminated. More of your products or services are generated in less time with fewer people.

Benefit 6 - Easy Access to Client Data Boosts Marketing Efforts: An information management system can provide you with detailed information about your customer’s buying activity. It gives you the opportunity to get to know each of your repeat order customers better. You can then sell them other related products or services that you offer that they are not presently using.

Benefit 7 - Heightened Communications with Clients and Suppliers: Proofs and/or specifications can be e-mailed to the client to hasten the approval process. Clients can also be e-mailed automatically when their order has been shipped. Enhanced communications can also be used with your organization’s suppliers. With a manager’s approval, inventory items that are used frequently can be automatically ordered via e-mail, or your database can send the orders directly to the supplier’s order system.

Benefit 8 - Concise Information Available for Tax Preparation and Audits: Going “paper-less” is not so scary, as you will retain a paper trail. You can use your newly automated system to prepare reports and retain customer records. The information can be reduced to paper or retained in a space efficient electronic format. You can make a back up of the records to be held in a safe off site place for audit purposes. Tax reports can be easily generated as required.

At Database by Design, Inc., we can help you automate your work flow. Contact us so we can help you get a jump start on lowering your costs and growing your organization!

Database by Design, Inc.
info@mycustomdatabase.com
<http://www.mycustomdatabase.com>
(503) 579-4638

Next Month’s Topic: Lift your profitability - Leverage your business to business transactions.