

Turning on to a Management System

Changing the way a business is managed by switching over to a PC-based management system, can be a daunting prospect. However, making the leap of faith can rejuvenate your business as this bodyshop case-study testifies.

Mastercars, based in Birstall, was established in 1991. It is relatively small but busy, and has seen steady growth over the years. Recently, though, the company's management decided it was time to start competing against larger shops without increasing in size. To do this, it needed to better utilise its current resources, load the shop more effectively and be more 'customer focused'.

Just into 2006, Mastercars realised that if it was to achieve these goals, it would be necessary to invest in a bodyshop management system, but there were reservations. For example, how quickly could the company switch from old to new practices? What about the jobs in progress during the changeover? Would there need to be an overlap period, of old working alongside new? And how would the new system be received by the staff?

With the investment in a management tool representing one of the most important changes in the company's history, Mastercars reviewed several management systems and selected EMA Computer Solutions' (EMACS) Business Manager.

Pre-installation

Mastercars has 12 productives and as many personnel in management and administrative roles. At any given time it has about 80 jobs on the go and 20 courtesy cars in service.

Before switching over to EMACS, Mastercars used to use a 'rolling' Word document to track what was in the shop. It was reviewed every morning by four people (the company's director, manager, workshop controller and foreman) who decided which jobs could be completed that day. It used to take upwards of half an hour to review the document and, once decisions had been made, six copies would be made and distributed to all of the above and Mastercars' receptionists.

Invoicing was done manually, replicating information line-by-line from job sheets. Also,

Mastercars had no formal time-sheets. Everything was recorded on an Excel spreadsheet.

'We put off changing over to a formal management system for too long, even though we knew it was the only way forward,' said Ian Sykes.

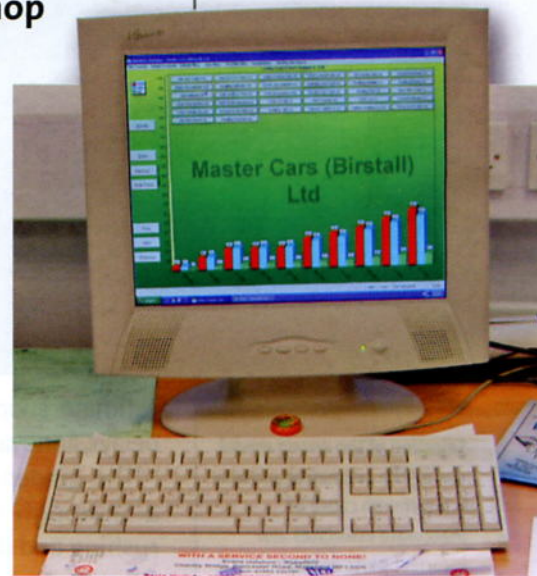
The installation took place over a weekend with three of EMACS consultants getting current jobs and advanced bookings onto Business Manager. By Monday, Business Manager was in place – and all the old systems were dead.

Post-installation

EMACS consultants remained on site for the first four days of the new installation going live. 'We've taken the leap of faith and it's working really well,' said Ian Sykes, Mastercars' Manager. 'It's shown us that we have far more hours to sell than our gut feelings ever could have known.'

Also, by having no formal means of booking work in – and by shuffling productives around to achieve each day's goals, Mastercars had (without realising it) been 'pushing' estimated volumes of work down onto the shop floor. By allocating work this way, the company had no means of knowing if the productives had completed any given tasks early and had no easy means of allocating work not on the day's schedule. Now, the productives are 'demanding work from above'.

Although there were a few tears, by the end of the week everyone was up to speed with the new procedures. 'The new system is having a positive effect on everyone in the organisation,' said Ian. 'When you see the throughput of work and realise your regular work patterns are being exceeded, that's when it really clicks.'



The system was installed over the weekend and went live on the Monday morning. Consultants remained on site for the first four days

Photo courtesy of EMA Computer Systems

Already, we're questioning why on earth we ever did things the way we used to – even though they made so much sense at the time