

Software Solutions



Custom software improves operations

Upholstery producers of all sizes can increase profits by going electronic

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With competition on the rise and the economy still recovering, upholstery manufacturers have to be more creative than ever to stay ahead. Technology is the way to do just that.

Custom software applications are often seen as tools for big business. In reality, they can help businesses of all sizes increase efficiency, streamline and condense business processes, and improve customer service. Steven Anthony Inc., a producer of classic modern upholstered furniture, is a perfect example.

Dramatic Improvement

The company experienced a 35 percent increase in sales and a 33 percent decrease in average production time after it started using a custom software application created by Pixel by Pixel. To think that kind of sales growth came from such a simple solution, with no help from external marketing, is amazing. But considering everything the company uses it for, this improvement is believable.

Twenty people work in Anthony's downtown L.A. studio. Since his clientele is high-end -- movie stars and executives -- he's a big-ticket producer, not a big volume producer. At first, his company seemed like the type where the main office could do fine with a calculator, file cabinet and stapler. But after observing their process, it was evident that there were gains to be made.

Pixel by Pixel created a database of Anthony's entire catalog of products and styles, including specifications. Because the business depends heavily on repeat clientele, a customer database also was created. Obviously, the ability to instantly retrieve product styles and their specifications speeds things up. Having customer information available and up-to-date helps maintain those relationships and deliver the best service possible. How all this information works in concert with other features helps Anthony run a better show.

Each time an order is input, pre-populated forms with information from the product database appear. If an order for a sofa and two chairs is being placed, the system will guide the user through available fabrics and finishes, and allow her to make selections.

After the order is input, work orders for each piece can be generated and printed. For each work order, a list of supplies is generated. This indicates how much foam, down, fabric and other materials are needed. If fabric, bases or any other part needs to be ordered, the contact information for specific suppliers can be seen on this list. This has eliminated production problems such as delays caused by not having supplies ready in time for production.

Improved Production

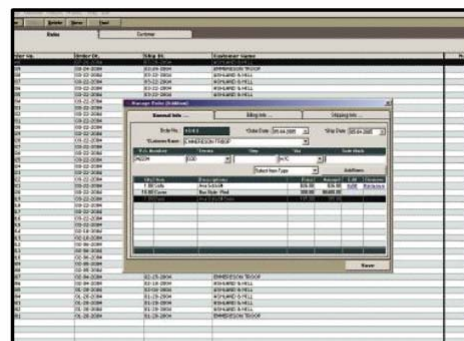
The improvement this has brought to overseeing production is remarkable. Employees with lighter workloads, or similar tasks in progress, are now assigned new orders. Work is evenly distributed. All orders in progress appear at a glance, whereas previously they were getting lost.

Billing also has been streamlined. Printable invoices are now generated according to orders as they've been input, then exported into the accounting software. Customers now receive their invoices on time and the money comes in sooner. Margin for billing error is eliminated. Even law labels can be generated and printed according to pre-stored information.

What's more, the company can generate reports that allow it to keep track of trends at a glance. By seeing which fabrics are popular and which pieces are most cost-effective to build, they can determine where profit comes from and where money's being wasted.

Shorter lead times

Anthony and his staff are able to do all this themselves. Previously, the average production time was six weeks. The software has reduced this to four weeks. Faster production allows the company to handle more orders, at varying stages of completion, at the same time. And since customers are satisfied with on-time quality fulfillment, they're placing more orders.



From the Order Entry screen

Inc. can select a customer and view or change items in the order. The background shows all orders in progress, with buttons to export them or generate invoices.

10 benefits of custom software

- 1 Increased efficiency
- 2 Streamlined processes
- 3 Improved customer service
- 4 Catalog database, with specifications
- 5 Work order generation
- 6 Shorter lead times
- 7 Accurate billing
- 8 Faster material ordering
- 9 Online ordering, tracking
- 10 Affordable cost

Anthony tells us how much the program has contributed to his success in its current capacity, but the existing platform can be expanded to do even more. It can be programmed to generate barcodes for inventory and production. It can also go online, allowing customers to input orders themselves and keep track of the orders.

Many upholstery manufacturers don't realize the potential that custom software offers. As with everywhere else, this type of program will soon go from nice to necessary. If you think your operation is too small, or you can't be bothered with the cost and effort of acquiring, learning and operating new applications, think of Steven Anthony. He'll tell you the cost and effort are minimal compared to the time saved. And solutions such as this are so affordable that upholstery manufacturers shouldn't have to manage production by hand.

Pankaj Sanghai is the founder and principal of Pixel by Pixel, a Los Angeles software solutions provider with experience creating software and Web applications for companies in furniture and other industries. For more information, visit www.pixelbypixel.net or e-mail info@pixelbypixel.net.