WHAT IS A DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION?
Digital Transformation is the process of solving business problems with digital technology instead of traditional methods. Digital information can be easily indexed and studied for trends to increase business intelligence and identify areas of risk. This digital connection allows businesses to run simulations, analyze data in real-time, and predict future possibilities. Just look at how much faster business moves today with email versus traditional postal mail. You can see how transforming traditional operations to digital solutions can transform your business.

WHAT’S THE VALUE OF A DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR A JOB SHOP?
Many job shops fear a digital system could not accommodate the variety of work they do. They also feel Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems are intended for large manufacturing operations, would require customizations, and are overkill for their small to mid-size business. In fact, ERP systems allow Job Shops to be more agile and react quickly to a wide variety of challenges unique to the job shop environment. ERP systems also make tracking large numbers of customers and costs simple. Not all ERP systems are large. Choosing a scalable, modular system that can grow with your business and was built specifically for manufacturing brings even more value.

WHAT SOFTWARE SYSTEMS ARE PART OF A DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION FOR A JOB SHOP?
Digitizing any and all systems is a good idea and will improve overall operations. More specifically, an ERP system can dramatically improve business intelligence. Adding a Manufacturing Execution System (MES) will improve planning and visibility. Integrating systems, like CAD design, nesting, and CAM packages to ERP and MES solutions provide incredible savings. Shop floor systems should also be integrated with all these tools for the greatest visibility. The right software systems should connect easily with other solutions in your job shop now and in the future.

HOW WILL MY CUSTOMERS BENEFIT FROM OUR DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION?
By becoming a more digital manufacturer you can offer greater transparency into the status of any order to your customers. From receipt of order to planning and scheduling, production, and tracking of shipments you can keep your customers informed throughout the entire process. Once digital, response times to customer requests for quotes will decrease dramatically with greater accuracy in predicting delivery dates. This will allow you to control costs more efficiently while offering the best price and quality to your customers.
digital job shop maintains a robust historical record of customer orders allowing for personalized customer service and advantages such as quantity discounts and quick turnaround on repeat orders. A digital transformation of your company can help make your customers feel like Norm walking into Cheers!

HOW WILL OUR EMPLOYEES BENEFIT FROM A DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION?
The biggest benefit of becoming more digital is the re-shaping of your employee’s typical workday. More connected systems mean more efficient communication and data transmission while spending less time searching for files, parts, jobs, and tools. Searching for a file may not seem like it takes a long time (5-30 seconds, depending) but it becomes a compounded problem when it happens 100 times a day. Employees may also be using a file that has since been revised to meet specific quality control requirements.

Not having access to or visibility of the information necessary to do a job is extremely frustrating for employees. Also, performing redundant tasks reduces employee problem solving and creativity over time. In a connected factory access to information and visibility will reduce frustration and tension while improving retention of skilled employees. This all translates to greater efficiency allowing your company to be a more competitive and healthy workplace.

HOW DOES A JOB SHOP BEGIN A DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION?
As with anything, setting a goal is the most important step. Establish a team of stakeholders and users to gain insights into their needs and concerns. Together, take stock of your existing digital assets to determine what can be used and what should be replaced. Walk through all processes and look for redundancies. Most critically, look for disconnected information that requires additional work to utilize. For example, production boards or systems that have information that must be re-entered into other systems. After all, one of your main goals for making this journey should be to improve your staff’s daily workflow.

Also, speak with other businesses, consultants, and vendors for feedback and encouragement. Pinpoint your most cumbersome concern first, then create a project plan that addresses this concern through a series of small, quick wins to keep the implementation moving.

WHAT CRITICAL QUESTIONS SHOULD I ASK SOFTWARE VENDORS?
We get it, there are dozens, if not hundreds, of software vendors to review during your purchasing process. While some are more familiar than others, many of the lesser known vendors may be a better fit for your company. Some of the more well-known vendors may have started in industries far different than manufacturing and then adapted to the workflows of manufacturing while other vendors may have begun in manufacturing and stuck with it. Here are some questions you should be asking any software vendor during your review process:

- What industry did your company begin serving?
- What other industries do you serve?
- What can I expect from the implementation process?
- How many support agents do you have in the field?
- Do you have any clients you could suggest as a reference?
- Do you have any clients comparable to my business (industry, revenue, employees, etc.)?
- How possible is it to migrate our data out of your system should we part ways?
- Is the software developed in a manner that supports both on-premise and cloud solutions at this time?

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Lantek Expert Inside allows for use of internal camera to nest on the fly for machine operators.