Can "Easy" Really Be Built In To ERP Software?

At a Glance:

This white paper demonstrates how the right ERP system contains ease-of-use and value for manufacturers. In this paper, you will discover how the Plex Manufacturing Cloud improves usability through:

- Consistent design and security features.

- Reduced burden of manual data entry.

- Simplified communications with other systems, partners, and devices.

White Paper

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THE MANUFACTURING CLOUD

One of the most over-used expressions in the computer and software business is "user friendly". It's a completely meaningless term, of course, because what's relatively easy for one user might be totally incomprehensible to another. The related term, intuitive, is equally abused and equally hollow. Nevertheless, vendors use the terms because they resonate – how difficult it is to learn and use is a major concern with any technical product or system.

That said, developers can and do put their best efforts into making a system as approachable and familiar as possible. The most obvious approach is to make the "look and feel" like something the users already know. For the last few decades, that has been Microsoft Office applications and the customary workings of most web sites – drop-down lists, question mark and magnifying glass icons, and the like. Everyone knows how to click on the magnifying glass for a look-up, open and populate an Excel spreadsheet, and most business users can also do sorts, calculations, totals, and more in Excel spreadsheets. So if the application developer mimics those functions, it should be relatively easy for the new user to learn how to work in the system and get the information they need.

Beyond those basics, the overall design and workings of the displays must be consistent across the entire system. Let's say a new user is introduced to the inventory application's screens, icons, and tools. If that person is then moved to, say, production control, those screens and functions should be familiar and work the same way so the learning can focus on function, not the mechanics of the screens.

Consistency also applies to security, access, and controls. There should be one sign-on, with access controls 'under the covers' so users can get to where they need to be without undue additional entries or codes. Those same controls keep people away from functions where they are not authorized to be.

The Plex Manufacturing Cloud is the embodiment of these principles – clear, familiar and consistent. Designed and built by the Plex team and maintained to exacting standards, the Plex Manufacturing Cloud ERP and integrated MES functions truly look and function in a way that users find both simple and amazingly capable.

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Reducing the Burden

The highest level of the sustainability hierarchy (reduce, reuse, recycle, responsible disposal) is 'reduce'; the most effective way to preserve resources is to use less right from the beginning. Applying that principle to people and systems, reducing the need for manual entry of information is not only sustainable, but it also very 'lean' and efficient. Automated data collection is much timelier than manual entry, and is a lot more accurate. The Plex Manufacturing Cloud contains integrated Manufacturing Execution System (MES) capabilities, meaning that the system is built to directly tie to plant floor controllers for machine-to-machine communications. Sensors and PLCs can report activity and measurements directly to the ERP system and the software can download schedules and instructions as needed without user intervention. Reporting and communication to and from the plant floor is also greatly simplified with ergonomically designed touch screen displays and barcode scanner interfaces.

Messaging

Another aspect of ease-of-use is simplified and automated communications with other systems, partners, and devices. In the automotive industry, among others, EDI communications between customers and suppliers is a critical part of day-to-day operations. EDI is a native application within the Plex Manufacturing Cloud, so ERP and EDI are parts of the same solution; no integration or interfacing with a separate EDI package is necessary. And it's already set up for communications with all of the major automotive companies so implementation is quick and easy. And because both the ERP and EDI (and MES) are in fact the same cloud-based solution, there are no linkages to maintain and manage – users need not be concerned with the technical details or the routine operational requirements. It just works.

The Plex Manufacturing Cloud system is designed for the web services environment with XML-based messaging for inbound and outbound data exchange making interchange across the plant, supply chain, and even across the globe, fast and reliable. Users can be confident that data is transferred

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without delays and without the errors that inevitably creep in when human intervention is a part of the process.

But is it Friendly Enough?

Designed for single unified sign-on and access control, a familiar, consistent look-and-feel, and full integration inside and outside the plant, the Plex Manufacturing Cloud is certainly designed to be approachable and usable. But that will only take you so far. The applications and functionality must provide the value. The Plex Manufacturing Cloud is widely considered to have the deepest and most complete manufacturing functionality in the market. And with its roots in the automotive industry, the Plex Manufacturing Cloud contains all of the release scheduling and accounting, EDI communications, and quality management functions required for success in the automotive supply chain.

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About Plex

Plex is the Manufacturing Cloud, delivering industry-leading ERP and manufacturing automation to hundreds of companies across industries including aerospace and defense, food and beverage and motor vehicles. Plex pioneered cloud solutions for the plant floor, connecting suppliers, machines, people, systems and customers with capabilities that are easy to configure, deliver continuous innovation, and reduce IT costs. With insight that starts on the production line, Plex helps companies see and understand every aspect of their business ecosystem, enabling them to lead in an ever-changing market.