Central Joinery

Left: Shaun Simpson, M.D.
Right: Wayne Hartner, Director

An interview with Shaun Simpson, Managing Director of Central Joinery by Sean O'Sullivan, Empower Software

We currently employ 40 staff, which probably makes us one of the top five shop fitters in Auckland. Work varies from commercial to residential including high end kitchens to high end fit outs and commercial. We have outgrown our current three premises of 4,500 m2 and are building a new factory of 6,500 m2.

One advancement we made in our business, three years ago, was replacing our time and job card system, in which factory staff manually filled out their times on jobs, with second hand PCs on the factory floor and Empower time tracking software. This system gives us tracking and reporting from the factory floor in real time, the benefits of which are significant, and include:

• we have found that our factory staff and office staff are very aware of times we budget for their jobs and, in general, our staff are very good at keeping their actual times on jobs to the times that we have budgeted for them;

• when there are overruns on jobs, where actual hours do exceed budgeted hours, we review promptly to determine the cause to help ensure any particular issue does not keep repeating;

• the accuracy of our quoting has improved significantly based on more accurate actual times recorded on jobs

• we have witnessed a huge administration time saving for office staff and our pay lady by replacing the old manual time cards;

• we have seen massive gains in factory downtime. Previously, on our manual time tracking system, our downtime per staff member per week was two to three hours on average. Using factory PCs and Empower software we have reduced downtime per staff member per week to on average of approximately 30 minutes. Two hours per staff member per week reduction in downtime across 40 staff is a saving of 80 production hours per week;

• time slippage both sides of smokos and lunch is also monitored daily on Empower to keep this to absolute minimum. Without time tracking this time slippage would be 15 to 20 minutes per staff member per day, which is 1.25 to 1.5 hours per staff member per week, which by 40 staff is a saving of 50 to 60 production hours per week.

We are now looking at investing in the Empower Job Scheduling tool to help us plan out our forward work commitments over two to three months to allow us to efficiently manage staff levels to suit work loads.

Our support from Empower headquarters, over the last three years, has been impressive – problems always get rectified promptly across the web, PC to PC.

Issues do pop up from time to time and Empower gets these sorted out for us in two to three hours. Also we have needed custom functionality and custom reporting in the software to suit our specific business processes and this custom development has been done promptly and at no additional cost which is great.

Some key questions

Q: Where, approximately, did Central sit in terms of turnover in 2011?

A: Over $10 million

Q: How big a step backwards would it be for Central to go back to manual time cards?

A: This would set us backwards 10 to 20% in accuracy of times recorded on jobs, which would significantly impact the accuracy of our real costs and all future quotations. It just would not be an option, Empower has been too valuable to us to go back to the old manual system.

Q: Empower Software was approximately a $20,000 all up investment for Central – would full payback have occurred in a number of months?

A: Yes. From a financial return on investment perspective, investing in Empower was a 'no brainer'.

Q: Was Empower easy and simple to learn and implement?

A: Empower was very easy to implement and we found it very easy for our factory staff to catch onto. A few of the older guys took longer then the younger guys to get their heads around it but, within a couple of months, all factory staff were on board and were happy to run with the system

Q: How do you find Empower for managing new factory staff that you hire?

A: Very good. New staff find it valuable because they can use the system to prove themselves and show us what they can achieve with times on every job. We also use individual staff performance reports from Empower to decide whether each new staff member is up to the task at the end of the work trial period.

Q: With good staff and any staff who maybe 'dragging the chain' at times, does Empower Software allow you to pay bonus or higher wages to those who deserve it?

A: Yes. Empower Software reporting has the accuracy of actual times recorded on jobs to allow us to pay bonus to staff who meet the budgeted times. This incentive works well for our staff and jointly works well for Central Joinery.

Empower Software will be present at AWISA stand 1408. The software will be demonstrated continuously over the four days using sample databases for kitchen manufacturing, shop fitting, commercial joinery and commercial furniture.