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Spreadsheets on the shop floor.

I found the article titled "Top Five Reasons Spreadsheets Are Dead Weight" in the March 2017 edition of Southeast Manufacturing News (www.mfgnewsweb.com) of interest, even if it was written by the folks at Shop Floor Automations, a company that creates software for shop floor automation. The points made in the article, which I have summarized herein, have validity. Reading the article, I was reminded of the actions of a client of mine who records on paper the production statistics of each job run, e.g. the number of units produced, the job start and stop dates and times of day, and delivers the paper to someone in the accounting department for data entry into the ERP system. Not data entry into spreadsheets, but the similarity was nonetheless relevant.

The article author makes the case that – for companies with sufficient production capabilities (e.g. more than a few machines) – the time spent entering data into spreadsheets is a waste, can be prone to error due to a lack of validation, and the data collected in spreadsheets has limited usability versus the data entered into a proper job scheduling – or I would chime in an ERP – software system.

Reason 1: No return-on-investment for the time spent on the spreadsheet data entry. This effort is akin to administrative typing and filing.

Reason 2: Data entry errors require time to revisit, investigate, and correct. I will add that even spreadsheets that use Excel's data validation feature and attempt to qualify data selections by using VLOOKUP or DGET will be limited in their capability and grow in their complexity.

Reason 3: Control-F is not the answer. The author's point is that searching for data is limited if the spreadsheet itself is only used for a limited purpose, e.g. that day's or that week's data entry only.

Reason 4: Limited constraint handling. The spreadsheet may not be able to adjust for new jobs or cancelled jobs or machine issues such as bottlenecks.

Reason 5: Machinists and office clerks are two different positions. As the demand for skilled machinists grows and the supply continues to shrink or remain stagnant, adding clerical duties will make it more difficult for the company to fill the open machinist positions. Extensive clerical duties also distract from the technical job-at-hand and delay the instant feedback machinists require relating to the job status.

Spreadsheets have many useful purposes. I love them for what they do and for the data analysis uses and data form uses I have designed and deployed them for. The rationale of the article author is sound when it comes to the fact that sometimes, at the right time, companies have to move on during their growth stages and acquire the right software to get the job done. It is no different than using the right tool when working on the job, as any experienced machinist would tell you.

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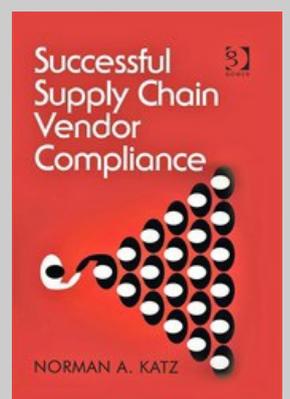
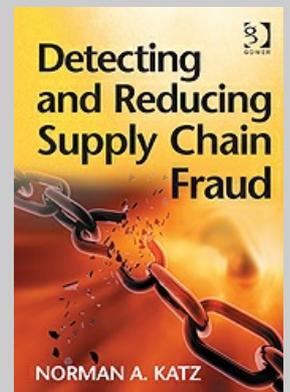


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