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FEATURE ARTICLE

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For Immediate Publication

Technology Times Are Always Changing

By Steve Epner

I was thinking about all of the changes I have seen in my career. Since writing my first program in FORTRAN (Illinois Institute of Technology, 1965) to sending presentations over the Internet, information technology has been fast paced. There is always something new and exciting.

As I look forward, the future continues to look great. What other profession will allow you to be at the leading edge of new concepts and opportunities? Think about it.

Where else can a professional employee or consultant so easily see what is happening. There is no other position in modern corporations that has the same view of the entire organization. Nothing is beyond our gaze. If real work is being done, then there is computer integration near by.

We are initially asked to assist management and ownership groups in getting the best return on their computing dollar. For advisors that listen closely, what we are really being asked is how can we change the organization to take better advantage of all resources? Automation tied with communication, tied to an educated work force and new business processes can create new concepts of business operation. There is nothing boring around here.

Look at the new world of electronic business. It is exploding. We take simple electronic capabilities and fine-tune them to make a difference. For example, everyone talks about the paperless office. I have heard about this for over fifteen years. As one expert predicted, the paperless office will arrive right after the paperless toilet.

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Technology Times Are Always Changing

Page 2 of 3

Even so, there is much that can be done to reduce the burden of paper. The key is to take one step at a time. Lets get rid of some paper. Take the invoice. It is an old traditional part of business. Probably dates back to the 16th century. After selling someone something, we send a notice of what they owe. If everything works correctly, the buyer will then send us money for the products they purchased.

In today's world, the reality is that when an invoice arrives, it is matched to the original purchase order and a receiving ticket. A clerk calculates what we should owe based on the number of things received, times the price agreed to in the P.O. If there is any discrepancy, payment will be withheld or the calculated amount will be sent.

Someone finally realized that the process was redundant. Why send an invoice if the buyer is going to calculate the amount due? Sure, it is a check on what the seller believes in the amount due. Who needs it? With computers we can make it easy, fast and much less expensive.

On receipt, the purchaser calculates the amount due and sends it to the seller. The seller accepts the cash and calculates the expected remittance. Whenever there is a difference, a call can be made to the customer to straighten things out. Most of the time, the payment will be right on. Of course, there is a need to have trading partners that you trust and who will work together.

Doing it all electronically saves the invoice processing on both sides. For purchasers that do electronic receiving with barcodes, the calculation of the amount due is complete at the moment product is accepted. All of the processing is without human intervention unless a discrepancy is found. Everyone saves time, money and processing effort.

Think about how many times order entry forms are filled out in a normal transaction. The end user completes one for the distributor or retail outlet. They place an inventory replacement order to the supplier's rep, which in turn orders from the manufacturer. New methods including vendor-managed inventory predict usage needs and automatically replenish inventory without a single order entry form.

Where else can we work our magic? What are you interested in? Personnel, warehousing, purchasing, financial management or any number of other necessary business functions. Find one that will be fun for you and innovate.

Where can you eliminate redundancy? The opportunities are many. All we need to do is keep an open mind. Do not assume that anything has to be done. Ask the stupid

Technology Times Are Always Changing

Page 3 of 3

questions. Help your clients see where they might do things differently. Point them in the right direction and you will have customers for life. Ignore the possibilities and you will forfeit income and enjoyment to others.

Steve Epner has been directing traffic on the information super highway since 1966. A highly regarded industry expert, Epner is widely published and has provided comment for national business publications including the *Wall Street Journal*. His experience in business, technology and strategic planning makes him a nationally renowned technical speaker. Epner can be reached at sepner@bswllc.com.

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