

Case Study - Sheet Metal Fabricator

Fabcon

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In the past couple of decades, the pace of business has increased exponentially. Expectations are that what used to take weeks to complete should now be finished in days. Or even in hours. Many of these raised expectations are the result of new technologies that enable a faster turnaround than was previously possible. So when the old world order clashes with the new, especially in a corporate setting, the result can be a huge bottleneck and a loss of efficiency.

One common example of that scenario is the use of paper faxes. These days the business world is used to operating electronically. An e-mail comes in, with or without an attachment, and it can be read, forwarded, replied-to, and filed for future reference all within the space of a couple of minutes. Not so with a fax, which has to be printed on a separate machine (usually in a common area) and then delivered. Pages can be lost or mangled requiring a retransmission. Even if the entire fax is received correctly, passing the information on to others means making copies and physically delivering them. Replying requires creating another paper document, and filing requires storage space. Individually it may not seem like much, but when you're talking about hundreds or thousands of pages of faxes per month with an enterprise-size number of users, the inefficiencies and risks of loss of time, money, or the documents themselves add up to significant numbers.

The Customer

Fabcon was one of the first companies in the world to create precast concrete hollow core wall panels for commercial construction use. Established in 1971, the company has grown steadily, and currently has four manufacturing plants around the U.S. in addition to sales offices in Minnesota, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan, Iowa, New York, and Illinois.

One of Fabcon's key differentiators is that its wall panels have higher R-values than other wall systems, which means its panels do a better job of insulating buildings from heat flow in or out. The company has also pioneered the use of many post-consumer recyclables in its products, including its new VersaCore+Green, which contains 54 percent post-consumer recycled material. Use of this panel provides building owners with many coveted LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) points. Today Fabcon offers a wide variety of finishes, aggregates, patterns, and color combinations for use in "big box" and small retail establishments, restaurants, manufacturing facilities, sports and recreational facilities, schools, clinics, banks, warehouses, airplane hangars and more.

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The Challenge

Having so many different sales offices and manufacturing plants would be a logistical challenge under any circumstance. But Fabcon's concerns are increased by the fact that they not only manufacture the panels, they also install everything they make in order to assure the quality of work in a highly technical, complex process. As a result the amount of paperwork generated for custom specifications and drawings, work orders, bids, contracts, and other business documents is often overwhelming. Moving these documents between various departments that need to review and/or act on them is often even more daunting.

Among the functional areas most affected were sales, project management, administration, contracts, and executive management according to Marketing Manager Scott Jenkins.

"Here's an example," Jenkins says. "At Fabcon the VP of Sales must approve all sales contracts originating from all nine offices. Because they require signatures for approval, each multi-page contract had to be faxed to a machine on his desk, where he would review, approve or alter, sign, and send them back. Working with all that paper was a huge burden for him, especially because his preferred method of communication is e-mail. Tracking the progress of various documents was also often a complex physical task rather than a simple electronic one. And the more we grew, the more inefficient the process became."

As an organization, Fabcon was concerned that the inefficiencies could affect scheduling, job performance, and ultimately customer satisfaction. The company began seeking alternatives that would bring this part of the business into the 21st century.

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The Solution

After some investigation, Fabcon executives thought that Internet faxing, where documents are sent and received via e-mail or a secure server over a standard Internet connection rather than phone lines, was the answer. They tried the service from the industry's largest supplier but began finding problems with it almost immediately.

"That service required us to download their software onto every computer in order to send and receive faxes," says Jenkins. "That was just impractical for the number of computers we wanted to outfit with an Internet fax service. In addition, the documents we received were in a proprietary format, so they couldn't be forwarded to someone who didn't have the software without being converted. The licensing agreement was expensive, too, especially at the volume we were using. We still liked the concept of Internet faxing, but realized we needed to change suppliers."

Their search for a new Internet fax service led the company no further than its own safety department, which was using MyFax. The difference was apparent immediately.

"When they received a fax via MyFax, it came in a PDF format," he says. "Everyone here can open those already without any extra effort, and without having to download special-use software. They were very enthusiastic about its performance, its ease of use, its reliability, and the cost, which was far lower than we had been paying for the other service. It was an easy decision to switch."

Fabcon rolled MyFax to its computer desktops immediately. The changeover was simple since MyFax handles all of the back end work and administration. Every user was assigned an individual toll-free number by MyFax, allowing them to send and receive faxes directly through their e-mail account. These individual numbers had the added benefit of improving privacy and efficiency, since faxes are now delivered directly to the person who needs them rather than to a common area where they can be read by anyone until they are delivered. Having individual numbers worked so well that the company is not allowing traditional fax machine numbers to be printed on business cards; instead, each person has his/her own toll-free number on the card.

The ability to easily share faxes when needed is another benefit Jenkins sees. "Often times multiple people need to see the same fax," he says. "Sometimes those people are not in the same office. One may be in the sales office while others are at headquarters or a manufacturing plant. Prior to MyFax we'd have to send multiple faxes, which got progressively harder to read. Now everyone gets a clean copy at

the same time. That alone has made us more efficient. It is also in keeping with our environmental impact goals since we've been able to reduce our fax-related paper use to a fraction of what it was before."

The Result

While Jenkins does not have hard numbers, the evidence suggests that MyFax has had a substantial impact on Fabcon's workflow processes.

"It's easy for paper to pile up on a desk, and for important documents to become buried under less significant ones," he says. "When you have a dozen faxes on your desk it's difficult to prioritize them. But when they're in an e-mail in-box with the ability to preview, you can run through the entire dozen quickly to determine what needs action now and what can wait until later."

Perhaps the most significant impact has been on the ability of busy employees to save time and manage important documents better. Fabcon's VP of Sales in particular is finding he is much more efficient now that Fabcon has a corporate MyFax account.

"You wouldn't think one piece of technology, especially around something like faxes, would make such an impact," Jenkins says. "But it really has. If we ever tried to take it back out there would be a huge rebellion. That's how much our users have come to depend on it."

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About MyFax

MyFax is the fastest growing Internet fax service used by individuals, small, medium and large businesses to send and receive faxes using existing email accounts or the web. MyFax offers services in North America and Europe, including the United Kingdom to industries recognized among the fastest growing adopters of internet fax including finance, insurance, real estate, healthcare, transportation and government. More than 15,000 new customers subscribe to MyFax each month. Additional information is available at www.myfax.com and www.myfax.uk.com.

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