

Quick Tips

Easy ideas to improve production efficiency

Computerizing Production

Effective use of computerized software can increase profits and create a better experience for employees and customers alike. Computers do many great things, and these benefits can be applied to production areas.

To be effective, plan your computer use carefully and do not rush into anything. Your business may be fine without computerization. There's nothing wrong with manual processes, and they should not be abandoned just for technology's sake. There must be a clear understanding of the benefits and costs associated with any software purchase.

For production areas, you must have a detailed understanding of your operations—where can you increase capacity or simplify processes. Most software does a great job of accumulating information—what points do you need information for (i.e., number of frames or mats cut), and how are you going to use this information (incentive plan, productivity).

Having a detailed flow chart of your current processes is key to understanding all of this. Follow the paper trail in your current process. Who uses what and why? This will be huge to prospective vendors if it is in written form.

Next, try to quantify, in dollars, the benefits you think you can get by implementing a system. Many people look at this in terms of man hours saved, positions eliminated, or information gathered to produce better results (i.e., increased sales/productivity). Then, try and estimate your costs by adding such a system—managing hardware and software, who is going to do this? What physical costs will be incurred—electrical, wiring, networking, number of computers, etc? Can your people handle systems and what is required—training, reorganization, etc? Then there are the vendors themselves—support, maintenance, etc.

If the benefits outweigh the costs, then go for it. Some systems allow a partial, integrated approach; some work with point of sale or ordering software. Finding the right software and computerized pieces is a long-term decision and cannot be taken lightly. Do your homework up front and you will have a much higher degree of success when you make a decision.

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Lighting Underpinners with LEDs

Only two things matter when assembling picture frames: precision and efficiency. We have figured out a way to improve both with one very simple modification to the standard underpinner.

By installing an inexpensive LED light bar on an underpinner's overarm, you can eliminate the shadow the overarm casts over a joint's point of assembly. This reduces eye-strain and can shave seconds off each individual frame's production time by eliminating the added time it takes for an operator to see the corner being joined clearly. If you assemble hundreds of frames in a day, these seconds add up quickly.

To set this up, temporarily tape an LED light under the overarm or the pressure foot's support brace. To figure out exactly where to install the light permanently, turn the light on and simulate the underpinning process. Place two pieces of a mitered frame against the underpinner fence and release the pressure on the pneumatic cylinders to lower the overarm and pressure foot. Adjust the position of the light until it is focused on the outside edge of the mitered joint.

When the light is focused properly, mark its position. Using a wrench, remove the overarm support and mark the bottom side with two center punch marks corresponding to the mounting holes on the LED light bar. Drill and tap the holes and permanently mount the LED light. Connect the positive and negative leads of the LED light bar to a 12-volt DC power supply and add a switch to the side of the underpinner.

If you need a source of LED light materials, we make them available at www.crestarmfg.com. We are also happy to answer questions about installation.

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