STOP RETIREMENT
BRAIN DRAIN

HOW AUTOMATION CAN HELP YOU BRIDGE THE RETIREMENT GAP

With retirement approaching for many baby boomers, distributors across North America are confronting an increasingly alarming skills gap in their workforce. As senior employees rapidly depart, so too does their valuable knowledge and decades of experience, leaving companies with a serious hiring crisis and more than one crucial role unfilled.

This mounting talent shortage is not surprising when you take into account the findings of a recent U.S. Census report, which projects that more than 20 percent of the total U.S. population will be over the age of 65 by 2029. Not only does this mean that your current staff may

soon retire, but it also suggests that there will be fewer qualified recruits to take their place.

Faced with a declining talent pool, it is now essential that you learn to initiate what is known as a brain dump — identifying and extracting the vast wealth of information your senior employees have accrued, before integrating it into training programs for your new hires. Without this, key product and customer knowledge will be lost when they leave, damaging your ability to provide superior customer service.

Since understanding your client base and how your products resolve their pain points is a large part of what makes your business model successful, this will then also impair

your company's potential for future growth. Over the course of their careers, your long-standing employees will have collected invaluable techniques (most of which will be stored exclusively in their heads) to effectively assist your customers. Your senior CSRs, for example, who have worked with their client accounts for years (if not decades), will have developed an unparalleled insight into their needs and preferences.

Meanwhile, your veteran sales reps will have accumulated a comprehensive understanding of your products to support your product lines. Such expertise takes a long time to develop and if you can't find a way to decipher and document it before they depart, you risk losing the key information that their

replacements need to deliver the same superior level of service.

Yet, considering the substantial expertise and coordination required to get a program like this off the ground, where can you find the time and resources to record a generation's worth of knowledge? The answer is remarkably simple — process optimization. Investing in automation technology which eliminates bottlenecks and accelerates business practices will rapidly improve operational efficiency and free up staff time to focus on this vital knowledge transfer. In the case of distributors, one area in dire need of this form of optimization is sales order processing.
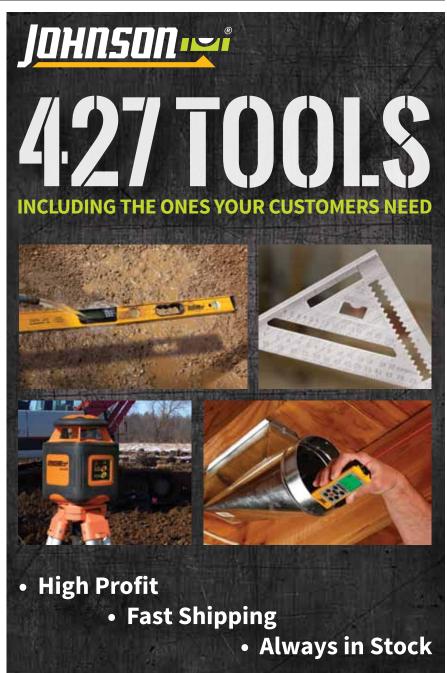
BOTTLENECKS IN YOUR SALES ORDER CYCLE?

Every customer has distinctive processes to follow when sending in an order, whether it be email, fax or mail. Since asking these customers to change the way they do business for your benefit is out of the question, you must be able to process a number of order formats to serve your clients.

In the past, this meant you were forced to mobilize a small army of CSRs every day to manually process hundreds of incoming purchase orders. A tedious, time-intensive chore, this manual entry compelled key staff members to leave other important tasks unfinished to compile orders as they arrived, manually processing each one separately before re-keying the same information into your ERP system as a sales order.

By introducing sales order automation technology into your internal processes, you can eliminate this highly inefficient manual entry altogether. As you assess your options, make sure that you avoid solutions which use traditional

Optical Character Recognition (OCR) scanning to capture data. Without 100 percent accuracy, OCR solutions will misread characters that will lead to incorrect order fulfillment.

In contrast, a good non-OCR automation solution will allow you

to treat email, fax and print orders like standard electronic documents, capturing critical line data with 100 percent accuracy. This information is then fed directly into your ERP system as a sales order with zero need for human intervention. All of your orders, regardless of their

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74

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DEC 16 | JAN 17

SALES**AUTOMATION**

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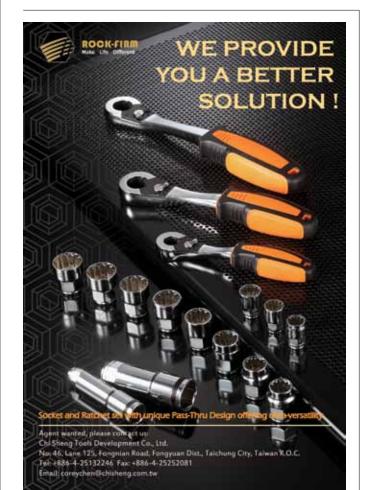www.ContractorSupplyMagazine.com

DEC 16 | JAN 17

75

BRAIN DUMP: identifying and extracting the vast wealth of information your senior employees have accrued, before integrating it into training programs for your new hires.

complexity or format, can be accurately and automatically processed for shipping — accelerating your sales order process by up to 95 percent. With no human touch required, staff can then refocus their time away from keying in orders and onto developing a smooth inter-generational knowledge transfer.

SHOCKED BY THE PRICE OF MANUAL ENTRY?

Today, as the pace of business continues to accelerate, time really does equal money. With your CSRs forced to work overtime to compile, distribute and manually enter orders, the costs associated with just one single email or fax order can amount to between $30 and $60. And this

doesn't even include the additional costs incurred when rectifying errors made along the way. Multiply this figure by the hundreds of orders you may receive daily and the expense of manual entry is staggering.

Reducing the number of human touches required to process an order, a good non-OCR sales order automation solution will minimize your operational costs by up to 80 percent. With these savings in your pocket, you will be able to reassess the distribution of your staff and funds, reallocating resources to help guide your knowledge transfer.

SICK OF COSTLY ERRORS?

Faced with hundreds of orders to process daily, each containing potentially thousands of product numbers and complex line items, it is no wonder that mistakes are frequently made. But, just one keying error can cause your customers to receive the wrong color, quantity or even product. Not only is this completely unacceptable if you want to retain your client base, but it also forces your CSRs to take even more time away from their other duties to resolve the issue and appease frustrated customers.

The right non-OCR sales order automation solution will precisely translate critical data straight from the purchase order into your ERP system, bypassing the need for human intervention entirely. In this way, the opportunity for error is taken away, liberating even more staff time to concentrate on customer service, product training and the upcoming staff transition.

Although documenting your senior employees' wealth of insight may seem beyond your current capacity, optimizing your operational efficiency will help you release the resources you need to develop this vital brain dump program. Advancements in today's technology now give you the ability to fully automate processes such as the sales order cycle, significantly refining your business practices.

In sales order processing, implementing the right non-OCR solution will accelerate order-to-cash cycles, eliminate error-prone manual entry, reduce costs and free up crucial hours. With these savings in your pocket and little to no staff time required for order processing, your team can focus on extracting and recording valuable customer and product knowledge, ensuring your company bridges the retirement gap and stays ahead of competitors. CS

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