

Do the People Who Run Your Company, Run Your ERP Software?

A well-organized workbench, tailored to the needs of its user, with key tools on hand and easy to reach, has always been a sign of efficient craftsmanship. Similarly, a well-organized, simple to use WorkBench, tailored to the needs of the user's specific role and specific job is a sign of an effective ERP system. Unfortunately, this type of role-based, tailor-able WorkBench hasn't been readily available to ERP users.

Until now.

Growing up in Providence, RI I was introduced to manufacturing at an early age. Providence was one of the most important and interesting places in the history of manufacturing in the USA. All during the industrial revolution from textiles, to weapons, to machine tools, to jewelry, many of the most useful manufacturing techniques used today were developed in "Little Rhody".

(Ref: <http://www.providenceri.com/history/publications/providence-industrial-sites/Prov-Ind-4-19.pdf>)

In fact, by the start of the 20th century, Providence was the country's leader in the jewelry and silverware industries.

During summer jobs in various jewelry manufacturers, I observed many processes which are still used today. For example, a "Bench Jeweler", (see definition below) was a critical and skilled member of any jewelry plant. One of my jobs as a "floor boy" was to bring the bench jeweler anything that was required so that the jeweler's valuable time was not wasted looking for materials or tools.

A bench jeweler

The term bench jeweler is often used to describe a jeweler who has a larger set of skills than that of a production worker. Thus bench jewelers have a fair knowledge of stone setting, engraving, and other skills that make them especially valuable. Whether it is used in one context or another, the bench jeweler is the jewelry worker who does the major metal work and the brazing, and its meaning can also be taken more widely to mean a key employee who is more versatile in the trade than merely an assembler of parts.

As with any craftsman, the jeweler's workbench was a place of high value production, where a skilled professional could perform many different tasks without leaving his station.

What has jewelry to do with ERP?

Today, more than ever, manufacturers are faced with less time, more expensive resources, and fierce competition. They must be agile, and the more of their key people who become the "Bench Jewelers" of the ERP system, the greater the chance that the company will fully benefit from both the system and the skills of those people.

Sadly, in too many manufacturers, the implementation of an ERP system that started out with great hopes, has evolved into a morass of underutilization, complicated and undocumented procedures, and non-use by some of the most valuable people in the company.; people who could be the company's "bench jewelers."

When the question is asked "Do the people who run the company, run the ERP system?" in most companies that have "implemented" ERP, the answer is usually no. Over time after much frustration, they come to tolerate it, they work around it, they avoid it, but they do not run it.

In working with many emerging market manufacturers, over the last several years, we saw a need for a different paradigm. With the bench jeweler's analogy as our inspiration, we developed a technological framework to produce the 21st century's jeweler's workbench, Role-Based ERP.

RB-ERP is a function-centric approach to ERP designed around actual roles in manufacturing enterprises which allows manufacturers to leverage their most important personnel assets: time and knowledge, and empowers the people who run the company on a day-to-day basis to "run" the software.

As users' need for multifaceted functionality in handling varied tasks increases, RB-ERP's uniquely tailor-able WorkBenches™ allow users to configure their WorkBenches™ precisely to fit the exact functions they need. With RB-ERP, each user has exactly what they need, and what they need to do, "just a click away."

Based upon actual roles in the manufacturing facility, RB-ERP enables users to perform their jobs more efficiently, in less time, and with greater accuracy. Manufacturing, customer service, and financial tasks can all be handled quickly and simply from one screen.

By taking this role-based approach supported by RB-ERP's exclusive tailor-able WorkBenches, manufacturers can both increase productivity and provide an environment where more is accomplished with less time and resources. Users have quick and complete adaptability to rapidly-changing conditions.

The concept is simple. Key people in the company have on their desktop a single screen from which they not only can pro-actively perform tasks, but into which they receive alerts enabling them to prevent problems before they occur.

What is the difference between the RB-ERP approach and existing dashboard or workflow approaches in other ERP products? There are 3 important differences:

1. Before any design work was done to develop the varied components of a WorkBench, an exclusive WorkBench Framework was designed and implemented. This framework is the foundation upon which all the components are layered. The framework includes a common user interface with standardized icons, buttons, tabs, integration to MS Excel and Outlook, a completely flexible security system, and a WorkBench Designer which is key in the tailoring of each WorkBench. In addition, a robust Query ability with rich selection options was developed to provide each user with options to group, sort, view, and export the data in a way meaningful to the task at hand. This Framework and foundation is unique and exclusive to RB-ERP.
2. RB-ERP WorkBenches (RBWs) are not dashboards, although they contain many graphical representations of key data with drill down capability. The RBWs are tailored by the user to contain data displays or active tabs to access other parts of the ERP system that they need to get their job done. And as roles change, the WorkBench changes to fit the specific needs of the user.

Although a senior manager's WorkBench may contain KPI (Key Performance Indicators), it also as any other WorkBench could contain, for example, a summary of Planned MRP Orders with drill down pegging.

3. And finally, regarding the concept of predefined workflows to lock users into a set of steps that must be performed in a certain sequence, or if you will, "ERP for Dummies", I have found that during 25 years as an ERP implementer, one of the most unwise things that can be done is to underestimate the creativity and knowledge of the end users. To chill their initiative and remove their ability to use their special skill sets is a wasted opportunity for adding value to the project and gaining a higher ROI. Would someone tell a master jeweler exactly what to do in exactly a certain sequence?

With the billions of dollars spent in developing and implementing enterprise software over the last decade, the type of environment and set of "User" tools which will allow an emerging market manufacturer to do more with less, and to build its own brigade of *Master Bench Jewelers* has been lacking until now..

A user must feel both comfortable and in command of their role, and the RB-ERP provides that comfort.

With a click or two an engineer can easily bring up a drawing, access the Bill of Material, and create an ECN all from his or her RBW (Role-Based WorkBench).

A customer service rep can find price availability, take the order, print the documents, ship the order and fax the invoice to the customer without having to “navigate” the system.

A finance manager can check cash flow, and email a key customer regarding an open issue.

RB-ERP is more than software. It is a state of mind, an attitude that says “We run this company, and we command and control our ERP software to help us run it better”.

Role-Based ERP – What You Need and What You Need to Do is a Click Away



Build Your WorkBench Today

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