

# Software – an ongoing investment

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Technology has changed our lives in fundamental ways over the past 10 years - ways we could never have even imagined! As a simple example, just think of the impact smart phones have had on our lives on both a personal and business level. Who could have imagined such a powerful tool a decade ago, and who could imagine life without it now? It has freed us from the office, connected us to our clients no matter the distance and made everyday tasks so much easier.

The same holds true for technology in the joinery industry. We have seen incredible improvements in processes and productivity from the correct use of technology. Some of this has been hardware based with improvements in machinery but much of this has been software based.

## Speed Of Change – Don't be left behind!

Technology is moving at an ever increasing rate and businesses must keep pace with the new technology or risk falling behind the competition.

Successful businesses are those that continuously improve processes through technology. The right technology can:

- cut down on manual processes,
- eliminate double handling,
- reduce errors, and
- reduce wastage

The end result of this is increased productivity & therefore profitability.

In light of this increasing pace of technological advancement, software cannot be considered a static investment. It requires businesses to invest on an ongoing basis to remain competitive. You would not even contemplate doing business today with an outdated phone - the same thinking needs to be applied to software.

## Importance of Software

Businesses continue to invest large amounts in CNC machinery to increase production capability, and rightly so. However, CNC machines need CAD/CAM software to run efficiently. And with software only a fraction of the cost of machinery, software represents great value for money.

Software has become the brains of the modern joinery operation. The right software is a key business

investment, providing the continuous process improvement needed to remain ahead of the competition.

Continuous investment in software allows you to break away from the competition. And your investment will be repaid many times over.

## Ongoing Investment

Software cannot be a one-off investment, or even something that requires an investment every few years. The best CAD/CAM software will continue to be developed on a regular schedule – preferably annually.

Annual upgrades should be viewed positively and seen as a sign of a supplier who is prepared to invest in their software solution and produce advancements that benefit your business.

Many joinery businesses see upgrades as an unnecessary expense but our mindset needs to change on this. Upgrades are a vital way for you to keep pace with advancements in features, functions and technology that allows you to continue to improve your processes.

The right upgrades are an investment that will help your business to remain competitive into the future. If you are operating with outdated software then you stand to be left behind by your competition.

## An Investment in Productivity

Instead of viewing upgrades as an unnecessary cost to the business, we need to shift our thinking and instead see upgrades as an investment in better, more streamlined processes.

Of course this assumes that the upgrade offers meaningful improvements in functionality that is useful to your business. A good software supplier will be close to their market and will be continuously including improvements suggested by their client base. So the upgrades will lead to real productivity improvements that will well and truly outweigh the cost of the upgrade.

## Invest in the right software

We heard many times at AWISA 2014 that businesses feel they have outgrown their current technology, particularly their CAD/CAM software. They are recognising that rather than assisting them, it is

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restricting them. And in this case, there is little point continuing to invest by way of upgrades.

So perhaps it is time to invest in a new generation software solution. Some of the advantages are:

**Concurrent Process** - new generation software can decrease time to market by supporting a concurrent, not consecutive, approach to your drawing, machining & production processes. In effect, the aim of the new generation software solutions is to allow for several processes to overlap, rather than having to be done one after the other.

This approach also allows for one setout operator to be responsible for multiple processes (eg drafting, cutting lists & machining), rather than having an operator responsible for each specific function.

**Exact parametric modelling** - providing you with the ability to quickly & easily make all dimensions parametric; length, width & depth. This allows you to make changes to designs in seconds, **even complex units & curves**, freeing up setout resources to move on to the next project.

**Fully associative** - all the workshop drawings, plotsheets and machining information are automatically updated with any changes to the model.

**Visual Machining** - New generation solutions now offer visual machining, with full production information attached, allowing the user to see exactly what is going to be manufactured. Errors can be spotted on the screen, before going to production

**Joinery Specific Functions** - no longer does the joinery industry need to rely on software that has been adapted to the industry. You can now access solutions that have in-built joinery functionality. This saves considerable time in the setout process, again freeing up resources to move on to the next project.

**Interface Functionality** - New generation software recognises the need for you to import and export files amongst your network. An incredibly useful feature is the provision of multiple interface formats for import and export. The more file formats offered the better.

**Integrated CAD/CAM** - new generation solutions are fully integrated CAD/CAM systems which remove the need for multiple interfaces and manual processes reducing errors and wastage.

**Single Solution** - the new generation of software solutions handle ALL work streams with ease. This has numerous benefits to your business including one system to purchase, one system to learn, one process for your team to follow, one contact for technical assistance.

## Important Questions to ask your supplier

- What % of annual revenue is committed to product development?
- Is this publicly documented?
- How many developers are dedicated to upgrades?
- How many developers do they have overall?
- How often are upgrades released?
- Are upgrades ad-hoc or to a strict timetable?
- What documentation is supplied with upgrades? eg, do you get a detailed manual of the new & improved features ?
- What testing does the upgrade undergo before release?
- What is the developers track record with upgrades in terms of meaningful functionality for your business?
- Do they offer a cash flow friendly payment plan option to lock in future upgrades?