WHY SHOULD COMPANIES CARE ABOUT AUTOMATION WHEN THEY'RE DOING WELL WITH THEIR CURRENT PROCESS?

Any company cutting lengths of metal, or drilling, boring and machining in any way, should care about automation. Repetitive processes, if not automated, essentially cost the shop money. The problem with automation is that when some companies hear that word, they immediately think, “Money. Time. Too complicated.” What they don’t realize is that they can affordably add easy-to-use equipment to their existing machinery and immediately improve throughput, accuracy and material yield. Despite the hesitation, there are some great, cost-effective add-on solutions available to them and their existing machinery.

A large part of why companies should care also relates to their own machine operators. Operators are in complete control of your throughput in a manual operation. Automating a manual operation puts the machine in control, resulting in higher throughput and decreased cycle time. Quality becomes more consistent as well.

WHAT CAN BE AUTOMATED?

Any repetitive material process can be automated. For ferrous processing, that might mean automating a cold saw, a drill, or maybe a bandsaw. For nonferrous shops, automation becomes even more of a critical add-on because material costs are so high. Again, because operators control throughput, an automation add-on can help your operator—and your entire material process—improve cycle time, throughput and decrease your material costs. For example, by automating your manual stops or push feeds, both throughput and cycle time become faster and more consistent, raw materials costs drop and production skyrockets.

WITH WHAT PROCESS SHOULD I START?

Look at your first material operation. Shops cannot merely inspect their end products to achieve quality standards. It’s imperative to build quality into your products right from the start, beginning with the machining process. You can easily estimate the impact of automating a process: Measure the time and effort required for the end-to-end process, surmise that your automation project brings the time within the proposed area down to zero, then gauge the time remaining. If you reduce one process to zero man-hours, and still have 90 percent of the original process time, you know automation can, at best, swing the needle by 10 percent. If, however, automation also improves a safety condition, or reduces operator fatigue and error, you will want to place a value on that accomplishment as well.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY “AUTOMATING EXISTING EQUIPMENT”?

Most customers have a piece of equipment that works fine. It gets the job done. It has limitations, such as no moveable stop, or any way to send data into it for processing. This piece of equipment is familiar to the operator, the production area, and in most cases is paid for. The scenario for this type of equipment is that it would be even more valuable, and be more fully utilized, through automation. Additional value,
improved performance, increased yield and more accurate part production is what add-on automation is all about.

**HOW IS AUTOMATION EQUIPMENT SERVICED?**

Service is part of the purchasing process; good service and accessible technical support are a big part of what the customer is buying. It is unwise to buy a piece of automated equipment solely on price. There are numerous places that advertise service on automated equipment, and it does depend on the level of automation desired. Is it more IT-orientated? More mechanical? When choosing an automation supplier, ask what types of trained service technicians are available. Does the supplier offer additional in-house training for a fee? What are the recommended parts that should be stocked at the customer’s facility? An often overlooked portion of service is phone support: make sure that your automation supplier has great service at all levels—on-site as well as parts availability and phone support.

**HOW SHOULD I CHOOSE MY AUTOMATION EQUIPMENT MANUFACTURER?**

The choice of an automation supplier should be viewed as a business partnership. It should never be emotional. Discussions with the supplier of what has been done, how it has been done, and why such automation is necessary are tantamount to making the best purchasing decision. Has the supplier done this type of project before? Has the supplier come in on time and on budget? Does the end user have in-house resources to support the equipment after installation and training are over? Also, ask for—and check—references from similar customers. The answers to all of these questions will help you choose the best automation solution for your shop.

Please contact TigerStop at Sales@TigerStop.com or visit www.TigerStop.com for more information and learn how you can easily add money-saving, affordable automation to your manufacturing process today.