



Jumping In: Embracing Technology in the Supply Chain

Through a series of emerging technologies workshops that the Canadian Supply Chain Sector Council hosted in early 2018 across Alberta, we learned that many small and medium-sized businesses don't know how or where to start to upgrade the technologies they're using; they're afraid of making the wrong move or jumping in too soon.

In the past, change happened over a longer period, and it was often prudent for businesses to adopt a “wait and see” approach in the face of new technologies, particularly when multiple technologies were competing for market share. It often made sense to wait for a “winner” to emerge, rather than taking the risk of investing early in a technology that might ultimately fail.



This is no longer the case. Studies by the McKinsey Global Institute have concluded that the first-mover advantage for transformative technologies is so profound that late adopters may find that the game has left them behind and that they will be unable to catch up competitively. “Wait and see” is not a viable strategy when technology is changing as rapidly as is currently the case.

This case study offers a look at one company that very quickly benefited from – and continues to benefit from – a new technology originally adopted to solve an urgent problem.

Case Study: Virtuoso Energy

The Challenge?

Virtuoso had an opportunity to quote on a large job that required 80 estimates for solar panel installations within a month. At the time, the company's process to provide estimates was very time-consuming, requiring site visits and roof inspections for information-gathering, and the development of drawings and proposals. In a month, staff would normally put out fewer than five estimates. How to ramp up to get 80 done?

The Solution

The company discovered software that it could use to project how much energy a roof would generate based on predictable weather patterns, to create renderings, and to predict ROI and the payback period on the equipment. With this software, which enabled Virtuoso to provide estimates based on information gathered from remote satellite imagery, rather than site visits, the company was suddenly able to produce estimates much more quickly. The 80 estimates it required when staff set out to find a solution were completed in about two weeks, well ahead of the deadline.

The software continues to save Virtuoso loads of time on each job it quotes. Now, with information provided by the customer, the company locates and measures the roof on Google, and can provide a full information package, including estimates that Gursh Bal, a co-owner of the company, says are accurate to within 5 percent, within 48 hours.

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Employees offered little resistance to the new technology; they were frustrated with the very manual system they had been using. The resulting enormous increase in their efficiency and productivity was proof of the technology's value. Bal says that, when you consider the time the software saved the company, its payback was very quickly done.

"As soon as I implement technology into any of our processes, all of a sudden, my potential goes up to being able to achieve the work of 10 people, 20 people."
—Gursh Bal

Another outcome of the software's use that has upped employee efficiency is the centralization of information it has enabled. Now, rather than looking through reams of paper to find information and coping with disorganized customer tracking – who spoke to whom and when? what were they shown? – staff can find all client information in a single location, another huge time saver.

Bal says Virtuoso couldn't have been successful without adopting technology. It has allowed the company to expand by hiring more people and taking on more customers and projects. He believes that technology adoption is no longer a choice; it's a mandatory requirement for achieving success.

As companies increasingly adopt new technologies, Bal emphasizes that older workers should be encouraged to learn to use them. His advice to older individuals: "Don't be turned off by the technology; it's a lot easier than you think. New technologies actually make work easier." He sees older workers as important contributors with "years of wisdom" who know "what it takes to get things done." Their expertise is an asset.