

Got Flow? Real production efficiency starts in the office

In a window and door manufacturing company, efficiency starts and ends in the front office. Make no mistake, how work is done on the factory floor matters. But all information flows through the office. Poor up-front procedures can eliminate all your hard-won efficiency gains on the factory floor.

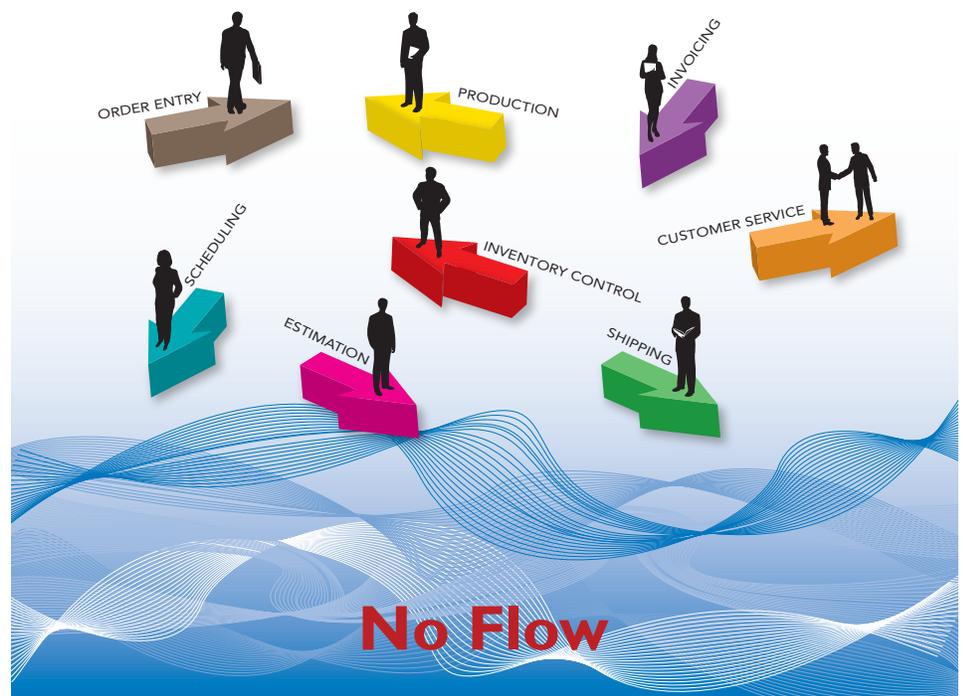
What's the key? Well thought out and executed Flow of information from estimate to invoice.

Same input, more output

Good Flow increases output for the same or lower staff, equipment and costs. It also does much more. It makes for responsive customer service, shorter lead times and enables production to be scheduled until just before a shift starts so you capture all the last minute adjustments and avoid rescheduling.

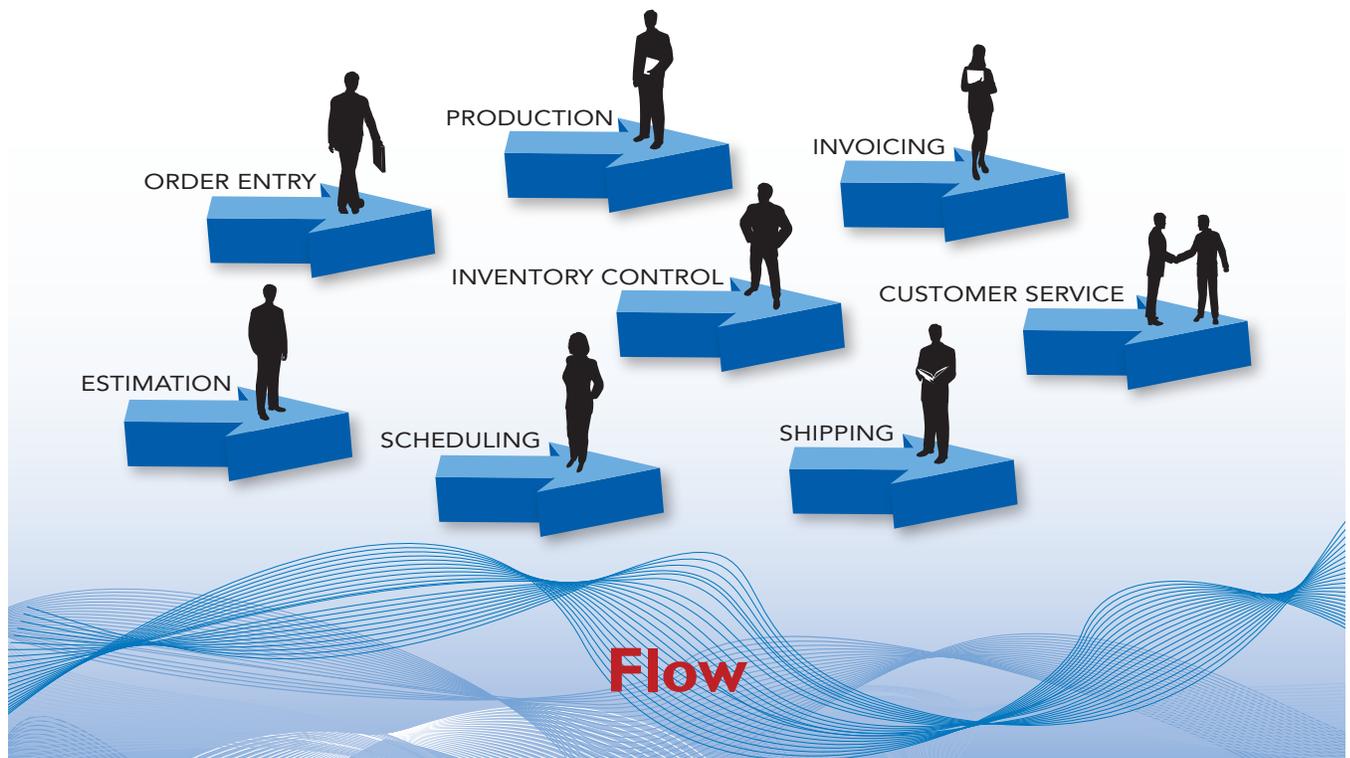
Even more important, Flow can be aligned to fulfill the values, promises and goals you want and be adjusted as you move in new directions. Speed, profit, quality, features, cost? You decide.

Lean manufacturing fans will notice that Flow and Lean share some similarities. Flow is even a concept within lean. But there is at least one difference. Lean says computer systems are not required. As you'll see, in a fenestration plant, Flow is difficult to achieve without them.



Inside: The Six Steps to Flow

The six steps to creating Flow



Like Lean, Flow removes obstructions to delivering customer value. Also like Lean, it makes your organization more resilient by building up a “reservoir” of efficiency and responsive customer service that cushion you during downturns and price competition.

Still, no matter how efficient your plant floor, your overall efficiency depends on the Flow of accurate information throughout your business. You want to make and ship the right units at the right time for the right price to the right customers, every minute of every day. This requires forethought and good systems.

Integrating the Flow of information and materials through your business from estimate to delivered product to invoicing creates harmony. You might need only to give up some current habits or take fuller advantage of systems already in use. Or you might need to invest in new capabilities.

It’s worth it: Flow harmony enables you to manage your company to fulfill your vision of how to serve your customers, to grow and to profit. Without Flow? You’re likely to be fighting noise every day.

for window and door makers

1: Connect all information points

Simple enough. Wherever information is needed it should be part of one integrated and connected system. If it can't be connected—and least 99.9 percent of what is in a window and door plant can be affordably connected—eliminate, replace or combine it.

2: Enter data once

At least two bad things happen when the same data is re-entered: costs increase and mistakes are made. The ramifications cascade: people wait; materials are wasted; shipments are delayed; customers become frustrated; invoice payments are delayed; profits decrease.

3: Make data available everywhere

It is useful to walk through your office and plant as if you were an order. See how people are, aren't or could be using information at each step. Ask everyone along the way how better information could help.

4: Automatically apply pricing, policies and safeguards

Computers calculate and remember better than people. This is particularly true for things like restrictions that apply infrequently but are costly to forget. Building as many rules and safeguards as possible into your system, such as disallowing estimating any unit your plant cannot build, improves Flow and saves money.

5: Allow for rule changes and appropriate exceptions

It's difficult to think of everything ahead of time. Your "Flow" (or fenestration system) should allow for appropriate exceptions and adjustments to the rules. You might be offering a limited time special or special order discounting may be required to obtain large projects. Where suitable, you want to be able to make these changes immediately.

6: Track and correct

When a problem occurs under the Toyota Manufacturing System version of Lean, workers can stop production. This is known as Jidoka. Many practitioners will not restart production until the cause is found and corrected. You might not want to halt the flow of information and production in your business. But you will want to be able to track issues and trends so corrections and improvements can be made. Good "Flow" systems make this vital task straightforward.

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