

MANAGING CHANGE

Engineering Firm Keeps On Top Of Change With CA-Superproject

When Ford has a better idea, Production Modeling Corp. makes the idea work. The 23-person engineering and consulting firm

In Dearborn, Mich., helps Ford, General Motors, and other major manufacturers anticipate problems in production lines before they're built. "If you're going to spend \$250 million re-designing a plant, explains Production Modeling Vice President Douglas Wilcox, "you want to make certain that the machinery you're going to buy and the processes you plan to implement will do what you want them to do."

While Production Modeling uses proprietary software and RISC-based computer workstations to simulate production line breakdowns, it uses ordinary IBM-compatible PCs and *CA-Superproject for Windows* software to put its customer's plans into action. Production Modeling uses CA-Superproject to create plant re-design schedules that show clients what they need to do and when they need to do it.

More importantly, the planning program lets Production Modeling change the schedule as the need arises. And the need always arises, says Wilcox, thanks to simultaneous engineering.

Simultaneous engineering involves different teams of engineers working simultaneously to design and test different parts of a project. In the auto industry, for example, one team might design the engine while another team designs the brackets that mount the engine to the chassis, another designs the chassis, and so on. Even before the vehicle design is completed, other teams engineer tools and machinery that will be used on the vehicle assembly line.

A design change by any team can unleash a cascade of changes affecting every other aspect of the project.

"That's where communication is so important to simultaneous engineering," says Wilcox. "If you don't communicate changes on time, it can create delays elsewhere in the project."

CA-Superproject isn't merely a project planning tool, says Wilcox, but a project management tool. Managers can insert new information, such as a changed completion date, into CA-Superproject to see how it will affect the rest of the plan. It also comes in handy for adding new tasks to a project, says Wilcox.

"Having a template set up in Superproject reminds them to check the milestones," says Wilcox. "People are less likely to leave something out."

A savvy manager can use CA-Superproject keep on top of details instead of being buried by them.

WINDOWS DEMOCRACY • Large corporations have long enjoyed access to project management programs running on mainframe computers. Even when they "downsized" these mainframe programs to run on IBM-compatible PCs, they were so complicated that they required a full-time project management specialist to operate.

CA-Superproject, *Microsoft Project*, and other off-the-shelf Windows programs have brought project planning software to the small business sector. Not only are they affordable enough for a small company, but they are easy to learn. Instead of spending six months to learn a program, users can pick up the basics of a Windows program in a matter of hours or days. "There's a reasonable enough learning curve to make it worth their while to learn," says Wilcox.

Before Windows-based planning programs came along, Wilcox says, small companies relied upon spreadsheets to plan projects. But spreadsheets lacked the graphic tools, especially Gantt and PERT charts, that show how parts of a project relate to one another.

"If you have a PERT chart with a series of boxes connected with arrows, it's hard to say you don't understand the sequence," says Wilcox.

Off-the-shelf planning software is gaining



Douglas Wilcox of Production Modeling Corp. in Dearborn, Mich., uses CA-Superproject to manage projects for auto industry clients.

popularity at small job shops that perform tool-and-die work for larger companies, says Wilcox. Many job shops are run by trades-people who know the ins-and-outs of their trade but lack formal training in project management.

They also use project software to manage day-to-day operations and schedule maintenance. A breakdown that forces a shop to miss a promised delivery date tarnishes its reputation. "In the auto industry, you're only as good as your last foul-up," says Wilcox.

Production Modeling doesn't just turn its clients loose with a project schedule. It goes the extra step of teaching clients how to use the CA-Superproject schedule. "We're proud of the fact we transfer technology to people," says Wilcox. 0

by J.W. Huttig

Product Mentioned:

CA-Superproject For Windows
Computer Associates International Inc.
(800) 225-5224
(516) 342-5224