



Eliminating Paper Enables Improved Business Performance and Cultural Transformation

A boat manufacturer transformed their approach to analyzing warranty situations by digitizing their plant floor.

Trying to Access Data Was Next To Impossible

Like many manufacturers, boat maker Smoker Craft has enormous amounts of data. The challenge, according to Quality Assurance Manager Dave Frey, was that all the data was on paper. All these bits and pieces of paper filled dozens of filing cabinets. Many man hours were devoted to painstakingly digging through reams of hand-written sheets to find a relevant bit of data. Old information was archived in banker's boxes and stored off-site. It was next too impossible to access the data in a timely manner.

Trying to analyze the data was *also* frustrating and time consuming. "When we used a paper system, it was hard to keep up," said Frey. This meant that at best the data was used for special situations – problems that were big enough to justify the effort to try and track down the data. When they had a problem, and they were fortunate enough to locate documents that contained pertinent information, trying to read the handwriting only added to the struggle.

For the most part, the company operated using old data, or handwritten notes on white boards. "When we came together for a meeting we were always working with old data. The problems weren't real anymore. Mostly we had opinions." This situation is ripe for cynicism, conflict, and apathy.

Challenge to Eliminate Paper and Improve Data Analysis

Frey knew he needed to eliminate as much paper as possible, and improve how the data was analyzed and used.

The legacy paper system provided no controls or standards. Inspectors were free to base their evaluations on their own opinion of problem areas, not on common criteria. Data collection was complicated because inspectors needed to be able to climb all over the boats to perform the inspections.



Dave Frey of Smoker Craft

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Any time Frey wanted to use the inspection data, he spent many hours compiling, retyping, and sorting data from paper forms. And because it was so difficult to see the big picture through these peeks into all the data, he often missed important signals and he'd end up taking his team down the wrong trail. They wasted time solving the wrong problem because they couldn't see the areas in highest need for improvement.

Intuitive and Precise Data Collection

Frey replaced their clip board and paper-based inspection process with iPads powered by Hertzler Systems GainSeeker Suite. The new system was custom configured to imitate the best part of the paper-based system. Users can still climb over the boats as they conduct their inspections, but now they tap iPad screens to log defect information.

Just as important, the system guides them through the inspection process. This guidance means that inspectors now follow standard processes and operational definitions. They now inspect with the same eye.

Not only is the data more reliable, the guidance the system provides makes it much easier to train new inspectors.

Rapid Analysis and Improved Confidence

The best parts of this system, according to Frey is "the easy accessibility to the data and the amount of paper we have eliminated. We had a lot of paperwork to file and it was hard to access. Now we just scan the bar code and all of that information is available electronically." Gone are the days of digging through huge amounts of paper or having to go off site to look through a bunch of boxes. He can now simply use GainSeeker.

The inspection process has become a lot faster, and the data is now in a form that makes analyzing the data very simple. Frey can use GainSeeker's powerful drill down feature on Pareto charts to quickly and easily identify the main areas requiring rework ensuring they are focused on the correct areas. Every week Frey meets with his inspectors to review the data in GainSeeker. Now he is confident he knows exactly what is going on when he engages in monthly management meetings.

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Newfound Insights Drive Significant Business Impact

By collecting the data using iPads, the inspectors have the ability to take pictures and record audio data. This additional information has been extremely helpful during audits or dealing with warranty issues. More detailed information about the condition of the unit when it leaves the factory has empowered Frey's team to understand the issues that arise during the shipping and delivery.

This makes it possible to focus resources where they'll have the most impact on customer satisfaction.



Better Data Leads to Cultural Change: Increased Accountability and Ownership

While Frey says the company experiences better warranty resolution, he feels that the cultural impact of eliminating paper has been significant. "Before using GainSeeker, everyone just thought it was part of life to not have easy access to data. Now they assume the data is there and it is accessible. There has been a real culture change. People feel like they can do something about it. They own it. It increases accountability and ownership."

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Hertzler Systems Inc.
2312 Eisenhower Dr. N.
Goshen, IN 46526
www.hertzler.com
574-533- 0571
info@hertzler.com