

Supa-Truss

June 2002

Supa-Truss is a manufacturer of prefabricated framing for trusses, walls and floors. The manufacturing operation is in Heyfield and the sales offices are in Paynesville and Patterson Lakes, all located in Victoria.

Supa-Truss commenced in the early 1980's and the present owners took over the business in 1994. Supa-Truss employs around 20 staff.

We talked to Jacob DeBoer, director, at the office and manufacturing plant in Firebrace Road, Heyfield, in central Gippsland, Victoria.

Who are your customers?

Home owners, builders and developers.

Do you have an established customer base?

Yes.

Are you trying to attract new customers?

Yes.

How will they benefit from your product/service?

Better price and service.

Who are your competitors?

There are many competitors and this is a very competitive field.

How have you been successful?

The high quality of our work and service.

How do you use digital technology in your business?

We make use of digital mobile telephones as some of our staff are mobile. We have recently introduced a PABX.

We have five networked computers in Heyfield using a hub and each of our sales reps in the other branches have a laptop. We use Microsoft Windows 98 and only occasionally use Microsoft Office.

The main software we use is Mitex 20/20 which is a specialised truss design software package that has recently upgraded from DOS to Windows. We have a computerised electric saw connected to the office computer running Mitex 20/20 and this enables a very efficient sawing operation.

The computerised saw does not make mistakes and cuts the timber between 50% and 100% faster compared to the previous manual system. This system also requires only one staff member where previously two were needed. Relatively unskilled staff can now be trained in a couple of days where it used to take a couple of months.

Only one of our office computers is connected to the Internet by 56K modem but we are desperately in need of broadband due to the large design files we need to receive and send to our clients. However I believe that satellite broadband is too expensive and ADSL is not yet available in Heyfield. We will immediately hook up with ADSL when it becomes available. We use on-line banking and Quickbooks for our accounting.

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Do you use a regular e-mail newsletter?

No.

Have you ever had problems with viruses?

No. Possibly this is due to the fact we do not spend much time on the Internet.

What measures do you take?

We use Vet anti-virus software.

How often do you back up your files?

This is probably a neglected part of our administration.

Any other equipment?

We use a fax and scanner.

Do you have a Web site?

No. We looked at developing a Web site early in 2002 but we decided to postpone this project until broadband is available as we do not want to increase our workload until we can secure an efficient means to move large design files between us and clients.

Do you have or are you connected to an Intranet?

No.

Do you use an Extranet?

No.

Did you write a project plan before you started?

Our major IT project in progress is the development of a Microsoft Access scheduling database. It is 95% complete. We contracted this project out to a young software developer associated with the local computer store. We looked at off-the-shelf scheduling software but none of them suited our needs.

I planned out requirements and designed the screen formats necessary. The purpose of this scheduling software is to track orders through manufacturing and delivery. It should free up a person, as our current manual system is very time consuming.

How much time did it take you to get up and running?

We have been working on this project for about six months and we are currently testing it. It will probably take another six months testing before we implement it.

Did you do the work yourself or use outside contractors?

Both, but the software development is all external.

Were you happy with the work and help given?

It is too early to say.

How much did it cost you?

I estimate the whole scheduling project will cost us less than \$10,000

What mistakes did you make that you wish you hadn't?

We left it too long and should have done this much earlier.

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What advice would you give someone else?

Do a lot of research to see if anyone else is requiring the same system. For example we became aware too late that a similar operation was developing the same type of software. We may have been able to jointly develop the software therefore spreading the project cost.

What were the barriers within your business to your digital project?

Lack of broadband.

Did everyone in your business support the enterprise?

No one likes change but everyone is getting use to it.

How did you overcome concern?

Ask everyone's opinions and ideas in advance and work with this input.

Do you know what technology is used in your company?

Yes.

Do you understand what it does?

Yes.

Where can people find useful advice about the subject?

From suppliers.

How did you decide which technology to use?

Talk to other users. The most important aspect is the service that suppliers can deliver. We could have purchased a cheaper computerised saw but our research indicated that the after sales service was inadequate so we purchased a more expensive saw with better service.

What is the most important thing you've learnt in the last year?

Always look for new updates on automation.

Given what you know ... would you do it again?

Yes, except I would have done our IT developments earlier.

What are you planning to do next?

I would like to have everything possible associated with this business to be computerised as it appears to drastically reduce the level of errors. Technology leads to greater efficiency and allows us to stay competitive. As technology reduces our costs we can sell our products cheaper but maintain the former margin.