



Technical Solutions

What Technology is Right for You?

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Overall Problem: How much technology, from simple to sophisticated, do I need or want in my shop?

While attending the recent Holz-Her seminars in North Carolina, it became apparent to me that many of the CMA members are indecisive as to how to handle the vast array of technology currently available in the woodworking profession. Hopefully, by answering a few questions for each of the various technologies available, one can make an educated decision as to what may or may not work for you. No two shops are the same, and the technological solutions that work for one shop may not work for another. Technology should help your shop in some way. If not, it should be avoided.

The following questions are meant to help determine if a specific technology is a good fit with your shop. Be honest in answering these questions as yes/no, on a scale of 1-10, or with hard answers. You should also determine which answers override and are more important than the others.

Business considerations:

- » Do I need this technology to compete in my market? Do my clients expect it?
- » Do I need this technology to keep up with my competition?
- » Do I need this product to stay in business over the short run?
- » Do I need this product to stay in business over the long run?
- » Am I considering this purchase for a specific job, or as a full-time addition for my company?
- » What are the up front costs of machinery/software?
- » Can I get financing if I need it? Do I need to use personal assets to secure the financing?
- » Am I willing to risk my personal assets for a business purchase?
- » What are the long-term costs such as training, repair, annual fees, and consumables (like tooling)?
- » Is there any item that can make the technology not function, such as a “key”, or time-of-use clause?
- » Have I considered time/cost studies with other methods of achieving the same goal?
- » Can I subcontract out the product I plan on using this technology for?
- » Will the quality be worse, better or as good as in-house? Does it need to be?
- » How much more (or less) will it cost from doing it in-house?
- » Will this new technology allow me to take on additional work?
- » Will this new technology allow me to do my current work easier, quicker or better?
- » Will this new technology allow me to do work I am currently unable to do?
- » Am I trading a faster speed for lesser quality or vice-versa? Is that ok?
- » Will this new technology really help me increase the bottom line?
- » Will it meet my future needs?
- » Is this a steppingstone to something in the future?
- » Am I considering buying too small a product just for the price?
- » Am I considering buying too large a product in hopes of needing it later?
- » If I have any slow times, can I use this new technology to do work for other shops?
- » What sort of interface do I need to work with other shops/software?
- » What is the length of time that this “new” technology will actually be useful?
- » When useful time and purchase price are considered, is this a profitable situation?
- » Does anyone I know own this product?
- » What happens if I put all my efforts into this technology and it fails, what do I have to fall back on?
- » Everything is temporary; will this decision last long enough to be profitable?

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Employee Considerations:

- » Can I find individuals with enough skills for my current and future shop needs? Will technology fill the void, if any?
- » Do my employees or I have growing disabilities that may be offset by this purchase?
- » Will this product replace any current employees?
- » Does the math work out that the employee(s) replaced will pay for the machinery?
- » Will I meet resistance from my employees?
- » Will I need to hire an operator for this new product? Is that money well spent?
- » Is the product I am considering more complex than either my employees or I can learn how to use?
- » Is the person in the shop who uses this product a problem solver type person, or will others need to be contacted to solve any problem that may come up?
- » What is the time to learn machinery/software? Can my current shop learn this information?
- » If my key employee leaves, can others take up the operation of this technology?

Shop/physical plant considerations:

- » What are some of the hidden costs such as shipping, set up, training, upgrades and tooling?
- » What is the time frame? How will I fit my current production around the implementation of this tool?
- » Do I have the physical space in my shop for this technology?
- » What sort of additional requirements are needed such as:
 - computer network
 - larger monitor
 - dedicated phone lines
 - bigger/faster computer
 - increased floor loads
 - increased dust collection
 - increased electrical amperage
 - increased heating or cooling
 - material lifts and conveyors
 - the hiring of a rigging company
 - openings in the building to bring the machinery in
 - the rearranging of shop machinery to allow for better material handling, to name a few.
 - permits
 - inspections
 - fork lifts
 - level floor
 - material carts
 - 3 phase power
 - larger air supply
 - noise enclosures

Supplier/seller considerations:

- » How reliable is the company that I am buying the product from?
- » If they go out of business is the product still usable and can I get parts?
- » Is this a “new” product, which may need more testing? Is the price/gamble worth it?
- » Do I have a reliable distributor to get this from? Can I get it from a different distributor if there is a problem?
- » Can I add other modules or extras to the product making it more useful for different purposes?
- » Can I get support for the products purchased and at what price (time and money)?
- » Who can I turn to, to get information from besides the seller?

Personal considerations:

- » Is this technology for my shop and me or am I just following a trend?
- » Is this purchase leading the company in a direction I want it to go?
- » Am I afraid of new technology? Can I overcome that?
- » Do I have any desire to learn something new?
- » Am I looking at this purchase emotionally or logically? “Technology for the sake of technology is usually a bad business decision.”
- » Am I prepared for the inevitable difficulties that may crop up in the implementation of new technology?
- » Will the purchase of this product be an asset to my company after all factors have been included?
- » Can I get myself to believe the answers I have given in this survey and make my decision based on that?
- » What are some other factors that might prevent me from acting, not acting (family, health, spouse)? Do these outweigh the decision I have made?

Editor’s Note: Send your technical solutions, favorite jigs, techniques or unique projects to editor@cabinetmakers.org.