Technology

The Manufacturing Apps That Will Transform the Way You Work

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What You Need To Know

Walter USA's GPS application recommends the best tools for your job.
Mobile access to app information can lead to increased efficiency and productivity.
Kennametal's app lets you research, calculate and order products wherever you are.

Here's a look at how mobility and new software could improve efficiency and communication within your manufacturing company.

Modern manufacturing is ripe with opportunities to use the latest mobile technologies and equipment, including intricate hardware and sophisticated software. The trend toward mobility in the manufacturing industry is not lost on software developers and programmers, who are creating a variety of smartphone and tablet apps aimed at helping machinists get the right tool for the right job. Readily available access to tool information increases efficiency and productivity while also lowering costs for tool users.

Manufacturing Applications to Help Answer Your Questions

Walter USA, one of the leading developers of cutting tools for milling, drilling, turning and threading, offers the *GPS (Guided Product Search) app*. A machine operator enters the type of material to be machined and the application to use, and then GPS produces a list of recommended tools and cutting data, says Thomas Benjamin, national accounts manager at Walter USA. Once the machinist selects a tool, the app lists its operating parameters. "Using a drill, for example, would include horsepower rating and average operating time before the bit needs to be replaced or sharpened," says Benjamin. The app also produces a report comparing the cost of using that tool versus what the operator is currently using.

The company's most recent app, *Walter Xpress*, is for custom tools. "We have a standard portfolio of 45,000 SKUs, but a lot of times the best tool for an application may not be in the standard portfolio,"

says Benjamin. Specifically, operators can combine more than one machining operation in a tool, streamlining this process and increasing efficiency. Walter Xpress uses specifications entered by the user to generate a 3D model of the recommended tool, a price quote with lead time, a powder bed 3D print and an approval drawing.

Mobility in Manufacturing: Connecting to the Right Source Anywhere

"Global tooling, components and advanced materials supplier Kennametal offers the *Kennametal mobile app*, which features key components of its Konnect e-commerce portal. "Users can use their phone or tablet to check speeds and feeds as well as product availability," says Mike Lewis, senior manager of commerce at the company. The app includes calculators for milling and drilling applications and a bar-code scanner so the operator can easily scan a tool to pull up product information. "The latest version released in December 2016 enables users to place orders, while future versions will include even more interactive features from the Konnect website," says Lewis.

The app supports our strategy of customer friendliness and ease of use," he says. "Customers may be out in the field, in a rural area, driving a van, and won't have access to a desktop computer. The mobile app lets them do these things from [anywhere]."

Apps like these also help provide better customer service interactions. The traditional time-consuming process of customizing tools at Walter USA used to include having a salesperson gather the information and send it to headquarters, where an engineer used the data to make prints to send back to the salesperson, after which that person would schedule a second appointment with the customer. The Walter Xpress app allows this all to happen right in front of the customer, which cuts lead times from up to 10 weeks down to as little as three weeks.

As the manufacturing world continues to adapt, mobile apps will streamline everything from ordering to assembly to delivery of parts. Apps aren't just mindless distractions on our phones. In fact, in an age of constant operation, global competition and a desire for more customized functionality, apps now play a vital role in any manufacturer's daily work.

What apps do you regularly use and which ones do you highly recommend?