Effective Job Management for Field Service

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ABOUT ASYMA

IMPROVING SYSTEMS, WORKFLOW AND INFORMATION.

Asyma Solutions believes customers deserve systems that work. We believe in using technology and management best practices as effectively as possible to make your organization succeed. We help by providing innovative and sound proactive professional advice, products and services to enhance the financial well-being of your organization.

If effective job management workflow is essential when working in the service management sector, whether it is with electrical, mechanical, or other types of service companies.

✓ What does it take to make job management effective?

✓ What are the current industry issues?

✓ How can service management systems solve these issues?

✓ Are service management systems right for you?

This eBook will answer all these questions and more, from the point of view of job management workflow: initialization, planning, execution, monitoring, closing, and continuous improvement.

The following six steps are important in every project, and to make sure you're effective, you must execute each one of them well.

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Chapter 1: The 6 Step Approach

Initialization Phase
The initialization stage is when you'll set up the customer and the site. You'll also finalize what it is you are setting forth to do – why is the customer engaging in this project? Why is it valuable to them? What do they expect the outcome to be?

Planning Stage
In the planning stage, you'll define the scope – when does this project need to be done? It is also the time to plan the labor, equipment, subcontractors, and any other inventory parts or people that are necessary to make the project successful.

Execution Stage
To execute a project, you need to collect information, and that's what happens in this stage. This stage is where the timesheets come in for the labor and the equipment; it's also where the materials that are being used on the job are coming through. In this stage, you'll also answer the "where," "who," and "when" questions regarding the subcontractor(s).

Controlling and Monitoring
During the controlling and monitoring stage, you take a serious look at what's happening to your project as it moves along. Projects can take hours, days, or months, but the scope is relatively unimportant. What is important is the ability to review the project and be flexible enough to make changes to the plan you originally made in step two.

Essentially, it's a circular process where you cycle between the planning, execution, and controlling/monitoring stages until you complete the project.

Closing Stage
Your project is now complete – did you make money or lose money? Here you'll examine the final invoices to determine where you made your money, where you lost it, and where you could cut costs and still be successful in a similar project.

Continuous Improvement
At this point, it's time to take into consideration everything that happened in the project, not just the financials. What did you do right? What did you do wrong? Where could you improve? In the army, they call this an "after-action review," but whatever you call it, it's critical to making your company improve day-to-day, month-to-month, and year-to-year.

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Chapter 2: Current Industry Issues

Service companies everywhere seem to have the same major issues, including:

⚠ **Inability to Cost Jobs**
No matter how you're attempting to cost your jobs – spreadsheets, QuickBooks, Simply, or with some other system – it's difficult to do accurately. How much revenue did you bring in and what were the all-in costs to make the job happen? These numbers can be hard to determine, and, as a result, it can be difficult to know if you made or lost money.

⚠ **Not Holding Project Managers Accountable for Jobs**
When project managers go out to look at a job but don't know how much labor is being charged or what kind of materials are being charged, they often aren't held accountable. Other project managers may actively pass blame or avoid responsibility; the bottom line, however, is that holding project managers accountable is critical to your overall success as a service organization.

⚠ **Difficulty Scheduling Employees and Resources**
You have employees, equipment, and subcontractors. How do you keep track of scheduling them? You need to be prepared, for example, to avoid double booking by planning ahead for projects. If you remove those employees and resources from the "pool," you can ensure that another manager won't book them for a project occurring simultaneously.

⚠ **Difficulty Collecting Time, Charges, and Inventory**
If you're collecting these items manually, with your employees writing them down on paper, it's likely to not get done at all or to not get done in a timely manner. This is especially true for time cards, as employees will have to sit down after the fact and ask themselves what they did and when. In that case, the time might not be allocated correctly – they might not calculate it in the right phase, etc. The same applies to charges and inventory insofar as accuracy throughout the project not being maintained. Data collection needs to be as easy as possible to ensure timeliness and accuracy.

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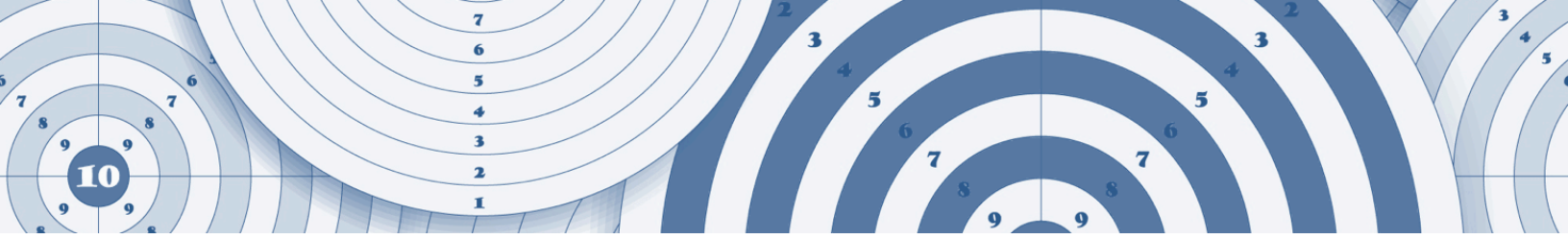1520 - 36 Street N.
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Chapter 2: Current Industry Issues (cont.)

⚠️ **Inaccurately Invoicing and Pricing Inventory**
If your invoicing is inaccurate or if you've made an agreement to price inventory at a specific rate but aren't doing so, companies aren't going to trust you. They won't pay until you've corrected the invoice or honored your inventory pricing, which can cause delays and cash flow problems while you find out what the problem is and fix it.

These things could also hurt your chances of getting future jobs.

⚠️ **Difficulty Preparing and Tracking Quotes**
In many cases, it's difficult to prepare and track quotes because potential clients sometimes want quotes far in advance of an actual project start date. Once you've prepared a quote, you might give a potential client thirty days to make a decision, so what you're tracking is that thirty day period. Because you likely have more than one quote out at any given time, you must be able to track which quote expires when.

⚠️ **Difficulty Tracking Inventory**
Many electrical and mechanical companies don't have inventories, or they have so little that they keep track of it by going out and physically counting it versus keeping track of it in a computer system. The problem is that people might borrow the inventory or take it to a job site, and no one knows the full scale of the inventory until they count it at the end of the year. At that point, they may discover that they didn't make any money because of poor inventory tracking.
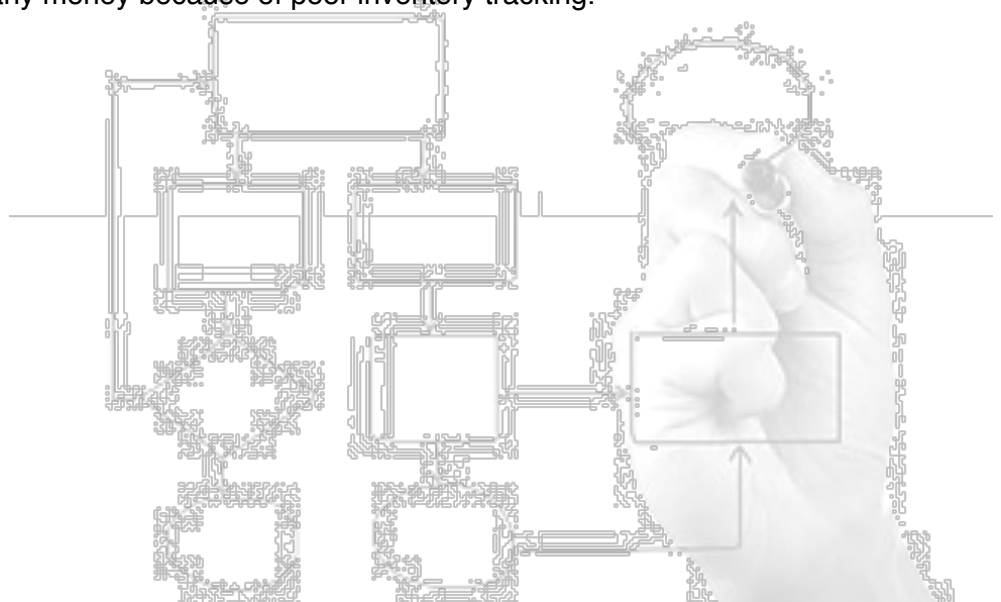
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Chapter 3: How Service Management Systems Can Solve These Issues

Initialization

Service management software allows you to prepare, maintain, and track quotes easily.

You can create jobs from:

- » Quotations
- » Templates
- » Prior jobs

To make a quote from a prior job, for example, you take the information from that job, copy it, and then make the necessary modifications, like changing the site location, to make it a quote for your current customer.

If you don't like your competitors continually eating your lunch, having accurate quotes,
which you can fully track, will help.

Once you've created your quote, the system takes care of the rest, including:

- » Billing
- » Labor allocation
- » Inventory issues
- » Purchase requisitions
- » Subcontractors
- » Standard charges
- » Burden and overhead allocation

When it comes to setting up a template, there are nearly limitless options.

For example:
You're doing a general furnace repair for a mechanical company. First you must go to the site, diagnose the problem, and get an idea about how to solve the problem. When you go back to the office, you might choose to set up your template in the format you typically use for service jobs.

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Once you've done that, the template imports the information and shows you what you'll be doing for the job, which will help you with your estimate. It will also help you to avoid missed billing and ensure that you have the actual costing done.

Another part of the initialization stage is agreements. When you set up a customer or a customer site, you can have customer agreements set up in addition to labor charges and billing rates. When you indicate that a job is under an agreement, the template automatically ensures that labor billing rates, the equipment billing rates, and inventory information are based on that particular agreement. It can be continuous or set up for a specific period or billing cycle, etc.

Common agreement functions include:

- » Agreement status
- » Period of cover
- » Review date
- » Cover % (labor, items)
- » Warnings (% of revenue)
- » Points allocation/usage
- » Notations
- » User defined fields

All service management systems have these functions built into them, so you'd receive them automatically with your installation.

Planning

In the planning stage, you'll be scheduling staff and keeping track of – rather than establishing, which is done in the initialization stage – billing. The software lets you select employees, equipment, and subcontractors and allocate any of them on a schedule the software offers you a format that allows you to see what's happening.
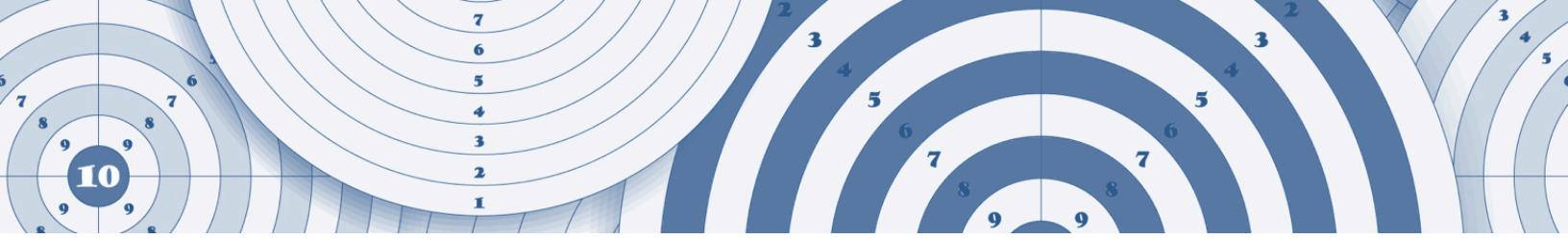
Chapter 3: How Service Management Systems Can Solve These Issues

With a service management system, you can see those things but also, more importantly, sort them as well. You can see where your employees are working and when, making scheduling much easier. You can see where your equipment is so you don't double book, and you can choose to sort in multiple ways – by account, hours, date, resources, etc.

Say, for example, that you have a service center in Lloydminster and one in Edmonton. With this system, you can break your employees down into two categories: those that can work in Lloydminster and those that can work in Edmonton.

You can click on jobs to see more detail, like the job number and a job description. Changing job specifics in this software environment is simple: click on the job you want to change, make the changes, and the system adjusts everything related to that job to meet the new specifications.

This system and its ability to organize and sort things to your needs will help you with accountability. The system makes it so easy to see what's going on and what a person should be doing that there are no excuses for not knowing.

Executing

In this stage, you're collecting information. You don't want to miss important information, nor do you want anything to be allocated to the wrong job, so data collection needs to be as easy as possible. A service management system collects employee time, equipment, subcontractors, job materials, locations, and many more, all on your desktop. That same information can also be collected remotely on a tablet or smartphone. Both methods are streamlined to ensure that data collection is seamless.

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Using the mobile interface has other benefits as well, including the ability to get sign-offs from the field. Using your tablet or phone, the customer can sign, and their signature is embedded into the system. In addition, the system collects and saves the information even when employees are working in locations without connectivity. When the system comes back in communication, all of the data is uploaded, so it doesn't have to be recreated or manually re-entered.

Mobile technology also solves the accountability problem. The mobile devices can be taken into the field, so you can hold your employees accountable because they have that information available at all times. They can track the inventory, see where employees are working and what equipment is available, all while watching everything that's happening in real-time.

If you are tired of not knowing where you are at with your jobs or with your business as a whole, these systems will help feel in better control.

Controlling / Monitoring

In the controlling/monitoring stage, you are talking about what you can build into these jobs, which involves templates. The templates allow you to have due dates built for each pass, phase, category, and job.

The bottom line here is considering the original estimate. Costs, like plans, always change. What did you originally estimate for this job? What is the revised estimate? You can put the changes into the templates have the revised information tracked. It also tracks the actual, and, as timesheets are charged, they also show up.

This is invaluable for monitoring jobs because when tasks are being done on time, it's likely that the job will also be done on time. Upon job completion, you can look at the collected information and ask – and answer – questions like "Did I solve the problem for the customer like I promised? Did I solve it how I promised and for the dollar amount I promised?"

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If you are tired of customers constantly complaining about incomplete or job passed due this will certainly help you.

Closing / Invoicing

If you've collected the right information for the labor, the equipment, materials and the subcontractors, and all the rates were the right amount, and if the project manager was reviewing and approving the timesheets throughout the project, all it takes
to invoice this project is pushing the button that says "invoice."

Now, what you want to know is "Did I make or lose money?" and "What pieces did I make or lose money on?" You can get a report out of the system that looks at revenue and costs to see if you're making money on the standard, labor, subcontractors, or the items. What overall amounts of money did you make – or lose – on the job? What is the markup?

Continuous Improvement

The software system allows you to look and drill down into the job to see what went right and what went wrong. In the drill down menu, you can click on various pieces of information to get the exact details or to get a different view.

Then, when your project managers or company owners are ready, they can go into the system, double click on the $40,000 number, and get an exact breakdown of all the details and what made up the $40,000.

There's also reporting on productivity – both equipment productivity and employee productivity – that allows you to see if you are making or losing money on a piece of equipment or an employee.

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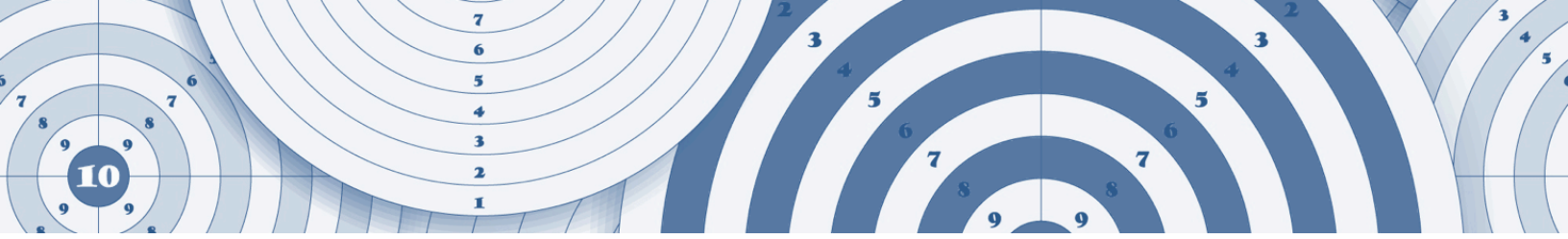1520 - 36 Street N.
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Chapter 4: Is a service management system right for you?

The answer to this question depends on many factors.

First, you have to quantify the costs...

- » What is the cost of not solving your problems?
- » What is the cost of losing money on jobs and not knowing why?
- » What is the cost of not having your project managers accountable?
- » What is the cost of not being able to measure productivity and giving the wrong employee a promotion?

Then, you have to consider the potential benefits...

- » Are templates important?
- » Is making adjustments to pricing and agreements beneficial?
- » Will an overall view with drill down option be helpful?
- » Is knowing where, where, and how you're gaining and losing money a necessity?

The bottom line is that it depends. You need to fully evaluate the cost benefit you've determined by answering questions like those above.

Ultimately, however, these systems are inarguably helpful and have the potential to help you grow and become much more profitable.

If you are tired of working long hours on administrative tasks that you really don't like then these systems can be the answer to your prayers.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss your challenges, please give us a call.

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