

B & L NEWS

July, 2008 Vol. 16 No. 3

Enterprise Software for Metalcasters

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A Customer Service Update

by Phil Laney, B&L President

Running a software company is as much about people as it is about technology. The two major groups of people are employees and customers. We take pretty good care of our employees, so I won't bore you with the details there. I do want to recap the new and improved customer service items we've developed over the last few years.

Dedicated Customer Support Group –

It used to be that your project consultant was both your implementation project manager AND your support person (phone and e-mail). As we grew, this position was getting overloaded and it was clear we needed to re-balance the workload. A new group was formed to focus specifically on customer support requests. This was one of the best things to ever happen at B&L. We have a group of professionals that stands ready to address your most challenging B&L software questions. And on the occasion they can't provide the answer immediately, they have the entire company behind them to seek out additional information. Customer evaluations reveal that responsiveness to customer inquiries has improved since implementing this group. Additionally, the project and business consultants are now able to focus more on customer implementation projects, reducing the time required to implement B&L software.

File Conversion Services –

It used to be that new B&L customers would have to manually re-key master table data

to populate the B&L database. In some cases, for some tables, this can still be a preferred option, but it is indeed an option. We now offer file conversion services to electronically populate the Odyssey database for customers converting from the BLIS product line or other 3rd party software products. This has greatly reduced the time required to implement the Odyssey software, and a faster implementation means a faster payback period. Also, training has improved because, many times, we can train customers with their own data rather than a demonstration database from a fictitious company. End users comment that the training is more meaningful with their own data on the screen.

Web-based Training –

It used to be that end-user training occurred either at the client location or at the B&L training facility in Bridgman. In some cases, for some applications, this can still be a preferred option, but it is indeed an option. We offer training over the internet where we can electronically link with your staff and hold a virtual class over the internet. Advantages of this approach included no travel expenses, no travel time, and shorter lead time to schedule a session. In many cases, these are significant cost savings. While some here at B&L might disagree with me, I still think that some face-to-face time between the consultant and the customer is necessary for a quality implementation, even if it's just one visit to kick-off the implementation. We have also added free, one-hour lunch-n-learn web training sessions

on selected modules. You can also watch a web-based, video recorded training session for free.

Improved Implementation Project Management –

In addition to the above items, we have armed our project/business consultants with better tools to help you manage this all-important ERP system implementation. Web based project management tools, along with expanded "go live" support, have enabled our consultants and customers to aggressively plan for and implement their Odyssey software.

CRM-Operations software –

We have implemented a web-based CRM-Operations system designed specifically for software companies. The system allows us to track all incoming issues (phone, fax, or e-mail) via ticket numbers so that customer issues are systematically cycled through to a resolution. Customers can log issues and check on status via a web-portal. All customer data is contained in the system, such as opportunities (quotes and orders), projects (internal and external), installed products, contracts, contacts, and billings. It's nice having all customer data in one system...sound familiar? (B&L Software)

While we've made some major changes over the last few years, we're not resting on our laurels. We continually explore ways to increase our value to you. We know we must earn your business and trust...everyday. Thank you for your business. ■



R&D DEVELOPMENTS

Doug Hinman, Manager, R&D

The invoicing module of BLIS is getting a couple very significant enhancements in release 7.0, which is due out later this year. One of those enhancements gives you the ability to combine several packing slips into a single invoice. This is useful when you have several shipments to the same customer in a day or week but the customer only wants a single invoice. The packing slips can even be for different ship-to locations because the invoices are combined at the customer bill-to level. Note that each packing slip item will still be a separate invoice item, but there will be a single invoice number and total amount. You indicate which customers are eligible for invoice combining so you don't inadvertently combine multiple shipments for those customers who require separate invoices.

The other invoicing enhancement is the ability to invoice surcharges separately. This is also controlled at the customer bill-to level. If a customer is flagged to invoice surcharges separately, then invoices where metal or energy surcharge applies will have those amounts accrued. This accrual is actually storing surcharge information in a history file where you can view what's been invoiced or not. A new option on the Invoicing Menu lets you create invoices for surcharges based on a ship date range.

Odyssey 4.1 includes several new features for the Labor Reporting screen. These features turn Labor Reporting from just a way to collect job data on the shop floor into that plus a work scheduling and quality control center. You will now have the ability to define the list of jobs each shop floor device prompts workers to job onto. The list can be open shop orders for their work center as well as recent jobs done at prior operations. The recent jobs option means they will see what work is actually coming at them so they know it's ready to start and not just scheduled to be done. When a worker selects (touches) one of the jobs in the list, its picture is immediately displayed for visual recognition. This is very useful when you have several look-alike castings.

You also define, by department or individual employee, the buttons that appear on the Labor Reporting screen. Instead of just clock on/off and job on/off, the buttons can now display casting pictures, generate and preview shop cards (with the ability to print a hardcopy), and display intelligent views (IV). The IV option includes multi-views, which is the preferred way to deploy process instructions, pictures, and videos to the shop floor, all on a single screen. With touch screen hardware on the shop floor, the Labor Reporting screen can not only control which jobs are performed and provide direct run instructions, it eliminates paper problems and improves accuracy by giving workers just what they need to do their jobs as well as provide immediate feedback. ■



Financially Speaking

Ron Thomas

I was zipping through the March/April 2008 issue of APICS and was somewhat pleased to find two articles about cost. The first was by Louis J. Malucci entitled "What's the Cost," and the second by Dave Turbide, "To Sell or Not to Sell." Prior to my 12 years here at B&L, I spent 14 years in accounting, predominately cost accounting and financial analysis, and would like to add some points to the excellent ones made by these two authors.

The "What's the Cost" article revolved around the computation of the cost of a Purchase Order, which is typically thrown about at \$50. From putting together cost analysis for clients and in my previous lives (employers), the point I would like to make is that putting a cost against an activity is better than no cost at all. One of the keys to profitable pricing is not ducking the cost of the activities it takes to produce your product. Ignoring costs just to hit a target price because of a false hope of "making it up in volume" only leads to grief; i.e., missed budgets and lost dollars.

While working at a truck manufacturer that experienced a \$2 million inventory write-off, I discovered that costs are not usually overstated, they are usually left off. The inventory write-off was a small problem compared to "understating" the prices that should have come from complete bills of material.

In the example of a purchase order, or a shop order, or an engineering change, or any labor-intensive activity (non material or non-direct labor), your non-direct labor costs should be compared to the costs as accumulated in the general ledger. Although it may be an obvious point to most, ALL costs find their way to the general ledger. So why not make sure that your cost system is relational to the buckets of cost in the general ledger, and by relational I mean that the initial calculation of the activity cost refers to the dollars in the general ledger, and most importantly that the costs upon which pricing is calculated is compared (monitored) to the general ledger on a frequent basis, no less than yearly. Yes, easier said than done, but the point is that today's economic climate calls for knowing your costs. The second article makes a great point – Putting profitability above sales dollars. Mr. Turbide puts out the challenge – Do you have the strength (and the insight) to refuse an unprofitable order? What I would like to add is – Do you have the confidence in the cost system (insight) to turn down an order? With weakening volumes reported by a growing portion of clients, the cost system needs flexibility to reflect changes in activities, and in the cost of those activities. A good example is that of a second shift. If the second shift is eliminated or just cut back, are there any fixed costs whose absorption goes unallocated, thereby causing some surprises when the financial statements are produced? The challenge is in the ability to look at castings not as material, labor and overhead, or even as an increase in sales, but to look at each casting as an increase in profit. ■



Brenda Povlock,
Manager, Client Services

This column is intended to educate users and point out features that may be new to the software. Hopefully, you find it worthwhile. Of course, for any questions or support issues you may have, please contact us at support@blinfo.com, or (269)465-6207, ext. 829.

BLIS-400

Dear Brenda,

We have tools at different revision levels, and a lot of times production is being reported with the wrong tool because our people say they don't have the time to go into each Tool Master to figure out which tool is the correct one to use. Is there any way to make this process smoother?

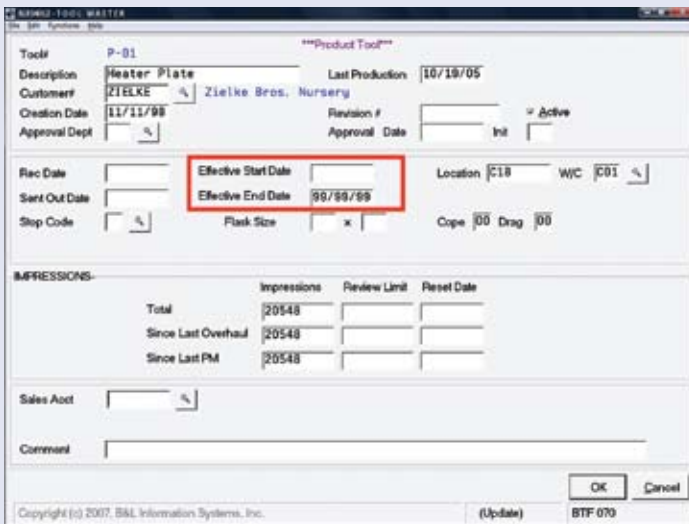
Tooling Around

Dear Tooling Around,

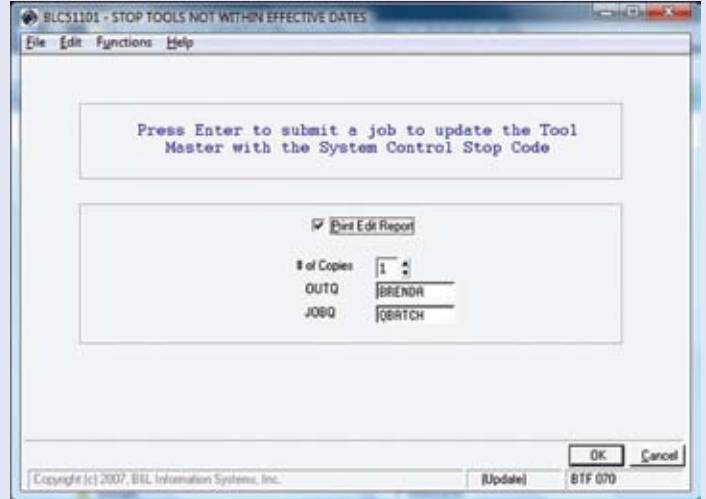
You are in luck because an enhancement was put into BLIS release 6.4 that put an Effective Start and End Date into the Tool Master. That's not all; now you can also run the option on the Product and Tool Master menu (MAM110 or MAM111 for Foundries) that's called "Stop Tools Not Within Effective Dates" (option 11). It defaults a Stop Code (from System Control) for any tool where the Effective Dates in the Tool Master record are outside the current date. If the stop code is set to error on production, then they won't be able to enter any production for that old tool. Note: If you have some tools that will always be in use, set the Effective End Date to 99/99/99, which will tell the system those tools are always valid.

Here are the steps to get started:

1. Set up a Stop Code (if you don't already have one) using Descriptions File menu MAM130 option 8.
2. Go to System Control and put the stop code in – the control is located under Product, Core, Tool Masters.
3. Put Start and End Effective Dates on your Tool Masters.



4. As needed, run the option to automatically put a stop code on Tool Masters where the effective dates fall outside the current date.
5. Stop tooling around and make those tools work!



Odyssey

Dear Brenda,

We have a lot of products that go to outside vendors to finish the castings. In July we will be taking a physical inventory because it's our year-end, and we have a debate going on right now as to which routing sequence to enter the tag at for castings that are at the vendor. We have one operation in the routing that is for the outside process, and we use it when we receive the quantity back from the vendor. I say we enter tags for any quantity at the vendor at the previous routing sequence, to the outside operation. My co-worker says they are outside so they should be entered at the outside operation. I've always been told that the quantity at each step in the routing is what has been completed at that routing. Which one of us is right? There's a free dinner for two at Red Lobster at stake here so please let me know ASAP.

Tag, You're It

Dear Tag,

You are correct so go ahead, put your bib on and get ready for a delicious supper. The quantity at each operation in the routing is the quantity that has been completed through that operation. Since the quantity is at the vendor and hasn't been sent back yet, that outside operation has not been completed. For example, let's say my routing looks like this:

Sequence	Operation
10	Cast
20	Grinding
30	Outside
40	Inspect

When reporting the physical counts at the outside supplier, the tag should be entered with the quantity at the supplier at sequence 20. After the physical when the product is received (either doing a receipt or with a 43 production transaction), the quantity is reported through sequence 30 thus completing that operation. Then once they've been inspected, a production transaction would be put in to complete the quantity at the Inspection step. This is true even if you drop ship from the vendor and you just invoice for the castings once your vendor notifies you. ■

THIS 'N THAT

By Matt Gacek

Cast Expo '08 was a huge success. Over 60 customers stopped by the booth to see what is new with B&L. In addition, we had a tremendous amount of interest in our software. I would like to thank all the customers who allowed us the use of their corporate logos on our bubble. The bubble featuring some of our customers' logos was a huge success. In fact, I had several customers ask me how they can get their logos on the bubble. First, we need another bubble. Next, we need your permission and corporate logo. For more information drop Sandy Warren an e-mail at swarren@blinfo.com.

Jerry Nagel's 20th anniversary is fast approaching. Every B&L employee who reaches that milestone has a party thrown for him or her...and then we roast'em. And for all those who know Jerry, you know this roast will be a good one (and long). If you have a story relating to Jerry and would like to share that story, please send me an e-mail at mgacek@blinfo.com.



Our latest hire is **Tara McKibben**. Tara McKibben is an Information Analyst in the Client Services Department of B&L. She comes to B&L with 18 years experience in the software development field encompassing a wide variety of application areas. She has a BS in Computer Science from Michigan Technological University. Tara is the proud mother of two daughters,

Kristin and Jenni, and loves spending time with them. She has two cats, enjoys sewing, quilting, reading, camping, and being involved in her kids' activities. B&L now has 30 employees on the roster. ■

Schedule of Events

Date	Event	City,State
Sept. 14 - 16	Spectrum '08	Cleveland, OH
Oct. 11-15	NFFS Annual Meeting	Cors d'Alene, ID
Oct. 19-22	The 12th World Conference on Investment Casting	Dallas, TX

For a schedule of free seminars of Odyssey software, go to www.blinfo.com and click on Media Center.

If you are interested in training please contact Brenda Povlock at extension 321.

Friends & Family

New Arrivals:



Congratulations to Dawn and Shannon West on the birth of their new son, Preston Leroy West. Preston was born February 2nd. He weighed in at 8 pounds 6 ounces and was 21" long. Preston has an older brother and two older sisters. Dawn is a Software Development Engineer in the B&L's R&D department.



Congratulations to proud grandparents, DJ and David Medlin, on the birth of their first grandchild, Ella Irene Wahl. Ella was born April 27, weighed in at 6 pounds 8 ounces, and measured 19.5 inches long. Ella's parents are Lindsay and Brenton. Grandma DJ is a support consultant at B&L. ■

OOPS! I would like to send an "oops" to Tony Ferrara at Phb, Inc. In our last newsletter, Mr. Ferrara was referred to as Dick Ferrara. His real name is Tony Ferrara. When Tony brought this to my attention, rather than write a retraction, I asked him if he would be willing to change his name. Tony was unwilling. Tony, I am sorry about that! - Matt ■

Congratulations

The Buck Company, Inc.

Quarryville, PA

Foundry

ISO9001:2000