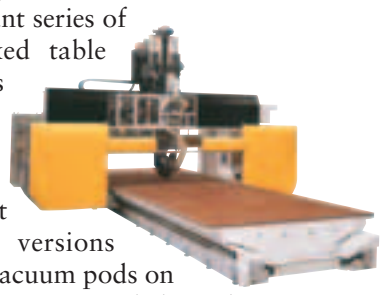
Wood beam machining centre

The **Routech** Oikos RT 4000 CNC trimming machine is a flexible centre for cutting, drilling and machining on beams, solid wood or glued timber. It allows the processing of a prismatic formed beam on all six sides with a single setup, eliminating the need for manual re-positioning or turn-over operations.

www.scmgroup.com **Info #212**

Moving bridge/fixed table



CMS offers its Avant series of moving bridge/fixed table machining centers in four widths and seven lengths to accommodate a large range of part sizes. Available versions include: vacuum; vacuum pods on moving rails; moving vacuum belt; and special versions for specific applications. Four- and eight-station revolvers, and three-, four- and five-axes automatic toolchanging spindles are offered.

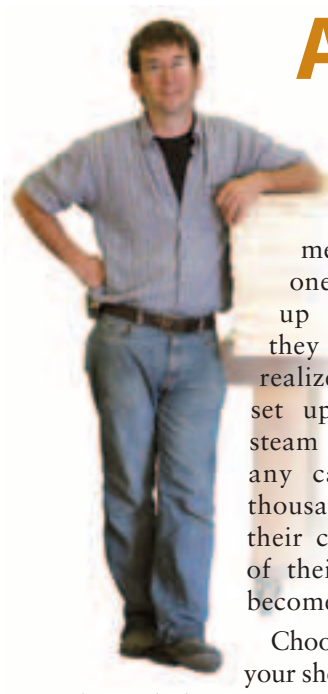
www.cmsna.com **Info #213**

Vector-controlled spindle speed

Homag's Venture 10 router is designed to grow with a business's needs. It can be upgraded to include additional processing and adapter units to meet new challenges, from sizing, profiling, drilling, grooving or dividing. The machine uses a rack-and-pinion drive system and has a work area of 4,175 mm by 1,730 mm. Spindle speed is vector-controlled from one to 24,000 rpm.

www.homag-canada.ca **Info #214**

The CNC Shop With Tom Morin



Avoiding shelfware

A software vendor once told me on the sly that well over one-third of companies end up not using the software they buy. Usually, they don't realize how much work it is to set up, and they run out of steam before it actually builds any cabinets. Now, a multi-thousand-dollar box sits above their computer reminding them of their misadventure – it has become *shelfware*.

Choosing the software to run your shop and your CNC machines is a big task; but getting it to run is gigantic.

Generally, it is best to automate incrementally. Pick the area that you think is under-performing or experiencing a bottleneck. For example, you could begin with estimating or order-entry and buy software that will solve that specific problem. Taking on too much can be very disruptive to productivity.

Don't automate for its own sake. Make sure that every department or task you automate will pay for itself, either by greatly improving efficiency or adding new functionality. Many owners feel out of their depth when it comes to software, so they delegate it to a computer-savvy employee who may be great with computers but is not necessarily concerned with the bottom line.

Don't be afraid of a hybrid system. Most shops end up using a few different software packages, finding ways to get them to talk to each other. In fact, it's not realistic to expect one company to supply all your software needs.

And don't forget to set a timetable. The real goal is to integrate the new software and use it daily to take advantage of improved productivity. Set deadlines and meet with the team weekly to assess progress and to make sure you're moving towards the long-term goal.

When shopping, get what you need. Most packages are really good at one thing, for example presentation renderings, but less strong on others. Don't buy a package because it can do everything; buy the one that excels in the area you need most. Since software is expensive, you don't want to pay for functionality you may not use.

Set a realistic budget for yourself. On top of the software, you will also have to pay for support, computers, implementation and training. Instead of squeezing software vendors for a better price, get them to include training and setup services, which is a far better investment. The software sticker price is only 25 to 50 per cent of the overall cost of a successful system.

Avoid proprietary approaches. Some vendors think they have all the solutions and try to force you to use only their products. Instead, look for companies and products that are willing to co-operate with your existing software, or other market leading software. You'll have many more options down the road.

Take demos with a grain of salt. A good demo takes hours. Force the demonstrator to use examples from your own shop, and not their canned presentation. Give them your day-to-day problems to see how their software might solve them.

And try to get a 60- or 90-day evaluation period. It really takes a long time to get to know a piece of software, and to know if it's the right one. It may also help to get references from peers, online user groups and machinery manufacturers.

Implementation is the most challenging stage, so allocate plenty of resources. Hire dedicated staff to get the system up and running. Software vendors offer these services but many shops feel it's too expensive. I have seen several shops flounder for years trying to configure software, where the vendor would have been able to do the work in a matter of weeks. Good software companies will also recommend independent consultants who are proficient with their product for less money.

Don't reinvent the wheel. If software comes with a good library or method of work, try to bend your methods to work with the software. Reconfiguring a program from scratch can take weeks and months.

Try to start using the software in your daily operations as quickly as possible. There will be time for working out the bugs later. It doesn't need to be perfect, it needs to be productive.

Most importantly, stick with it. Setting up software is a big deal. No software system is perfect. So take advantage of its strengths, and find good ways to work around its weaknesses. The key is to get your investment to work for you as quickly as possible, so that you can reap the dividends and avoid adding to the industry's collection of shelfware.

Tom Morin is the owner of Morin Wood Manufacturing Inc. Send comments or questions to tom@morinwood.ca.