

## Complex business needs require flexible business systems

by Erik Miller, Director Glass Market Products and Services, GTS

Glazing contractors and full-service glass companies are facing the most challenging business climate in recent history. Many companies experienced continued prosperity during the downturn in residential construction by redeploying their resources to the commercial construction boom. With leading indicators showing a dramatic slowdown coming in commercial construction, maintaining profitability will be more challenging than ever. While many companies will fail during the downturn, the best run companies will adjust and become stronger. Successful companies will be the ones that eliminate costly mistakes, improve operating efficiencies and have real-time information from all areas of the business.

As maintaining profitability gets tougher, information technology is crucial. Companies that use information technology effectively throughout their business have a huge competitive advantage. For commercial glaziers, this begins with using estimating software to create accurate material and labor estimates to help eliminate mistakes in bidding jobs. For the retail residential business, the ability to quickly produce accurate, professional estimates for everything from shower doors and mirrors to window and door replacements can make the difference in winning the customer's business.

When looking for business management solution, the full-service glass company should ask:

- Does the system understand the specific needs of a full-service glass company?
- Will the system allow management of inventory for both retail and commercial operations?
- Will the system bring information from the commercial and retail businesses together for management reporting?
- Does the system allow imports from storefront estimating programs?
- Can information be exported to specialty applications?
- Is there a choice of which accounting system is used?
- Can the accounting system be changed if needs change?
- Does supplier offer hosting services with Internet access?
- Will the system be flexible and adapt to new business changes?

Project managers need the support of effective systems to manage work in progress. From creating accurate and timely material orders to scheduling labor, mistakes and inefficiencies quickly erode profit margins and can damage customer relationships. Managing costs and producing accurate billings from the accounting system are critical for cash-flow. Easy to use real-time business intelligence reporting is important for management to monitor everything from which customers are most

profitable to employee productivity and cash flow.

The more complex the business, the more important it is to have information systems that manage all areas of the business, and are flexible enough to change as needs change. Too often, full-service glass companies find themselves with several separate systems, a point-of-sale system for the retail residential business, a separate manual or construction focused system for commercial contracts, and yet another for estimating storefronts. These disjointed systems are inefficient and prone to errors as data is re-keyed from one system into another. For business analysis countless hours are spent compiling information from these separate systems to provide management reports.

Finding a complete all-in-one business management system for full-service glass companies isn't practical. One-size-fits-all systems tend to do one or perhaps two functions well, but will be weak in other areas. Most full-service glass companies today are a complex mix of business offerings that reach beyond retail flat glass and commercial glazing. Some may service the residential market with products like paint or floor coverings while some may have specialty fabrication businesses like steel security doors. One software vendor is unlikely to provide systems that can effectively manage all the needs.

Today's software technology makes it possible to develop applications that can easily communicate with applications from different suppliers. Whether they share a common database or communicate over the Internet, today's business management systems should be designed to allow the full-service glass company to integrate specialty applications together with their accounting system to create a complete business management solution.

At GTS, we strive to provide complete business management solutions by integrating multiple best-of-breed applications to fit the exact needs of a full-service glass company. GTS designed its GlasPacLX application to meet the specific needs of full-service glass and commercial glazing companies by offering services including: a flat glass aware inventory system, integrated purchasing for inventory and commercial jobs, commercial contract management with progress billing and job costing, in addition to others.

Having a flexible set of applications that meet the needs of all areas of the business integrated into one complete business solution will improve business productivity and profitability today, and be adaptable as needs change in the future.