

Software Tools Streamline Tasks For Bisballe Forest Products, Inc.

Like most loggers, Kurt Bisballe, principal in Bisballe Forest Products, Lake City, Mich., had much rather be in the woods than in the office. He prefers being on the job, seeing first-hand what is working well and what needs improvement. Preferences aside, the reality is that he brings the most value to his customers and employees when he is able to spend more time in the woods and with his customers, not stuck behind his desk.

Yet somehow he found himself spending more and more hours in the office as his business grew, trying to ensure that landowners and employees were being paid properly, and that, in turn, he was also being paid properly by the mills. And then, of course, there were the countless hours spent analyzing job performance and production information after the fact to see if he was actually making money.

About 10 years ago, Kurt ran across an article in *Timber Harvesting* featuring the magazine's 2006 Logger of the Year, Dick Walsh Forest Products in Minnesota. In that article, Jodi Walsh, the office manager, mentioned her investment in Caribou Software's Logger's Edge system as one of the best and most cost-effective changes they had introduced to the business. She talked about using the Logger's Edge to track timber contracts, keep up with production by product categories, track deliveries and record actual trucking

and equipment costs.

That got Kurt's wheels turning, and within a month of reading that article, he made the same investment. At the time, Kurt's business was much smaller than Walsh's operation, but Caribou's special price for smaller loggers made for a very worthwhile investment.

Sorting It Out

By getting the jobs and rate information set up in the software, it meant that Kurt could enlist the help of others, including his mother, Norma, and more recently his sister-in-law, Kristi, to assist with the paperwork. For example, with all the rate information set up in advance, someone else (specifically his ever-faithful mother) could take the tickets from truckers, enter them into the Logger's Edge, push a button in the software to match all the rate information with the tickets, and automatically separate them onto individual pay settlements for each of the logging crews and truckers. The software also calculates the production bonuses that are owing to each of his crew members for the week based on the volume harvested.

Norma also enters the hours worked by each crew member into the software, and the software calculates the hourly pay for each employee as well. All Kurt has to do now is come into

the office to review the software's output, provide any rate information that he may have missed, and sign checks. He can also review production and delivery reports that help him manage his quota more efficiently, and he can review job reports that show the revenue from each job compared to trucking, labor, stumpage, and other job-specific costs.

The software has allowed Bisballe to leverage his time much more effectively, freeing him to spend more time in the woods.

When Bisballe first started using the software in 2006,

the family had two crews. They have grown substantially and now have seven crews and two subcontract crews.

Maintenance Too

With all that growth, the ever-increasing burden of staying on top of machine and truck maintenance—the business owns 40-plus machines, trucks, and trailers—became overwhelming. They tried to keep manual records in a notebook and a series of paper files, but as Cody Caron, their mechanic, put it, “it was a real pain to stay on top of when services were coming due for what equipment.”

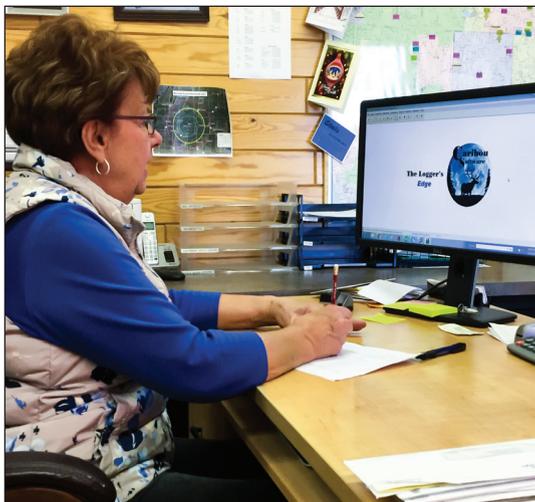
It became clear after a couple years that they needed some kind of software tracking tool in the shop as well. After trying a maintenance tracking product from another company without much success, they adopted Caribou's Mechanic's Edge software system.

Kristi took ownership of getting the system set up, but now Cody maintains the data day-to-day. The software generates a report that lists all equipment that is coming due or is overdue for various services. Each equipment or group of equipment can be assigned a service schedule, indicating the frequency of major inspections or service events such as oil changes, hydraulic filter changes, fire extinguisher changes, tire changes, annual DOT inspections, etc. The software then keeps track of when an event was last performed, and can flag Cody when it is coming due.

The software has allowed Cody to be much more organized about gathering parts at the beginning of the day, and doing multiple services at once. Upon completion of the service, he updates the software to indicate the meter reading at which the service was completed, and that equipment drops off the list until its next service is due.

Norma and Kristi cannot imagine having been able to sustain their growth over the years without efficiency-enhancing software tools in place.

The software has enabled Bisballe Forest Products to complete administrative responsibilities with ease and organization, and as a result has enabled Kurt and his brother Chad to stay focused on harvesting operations while still being able to efficiently analyze the economics of their business. **TH**



Norma Bisballe brings up Logger's Edge software at the beginning of another work day.