

Can “Easy” Really Be Built into ERP and MES Software?



At a Glance:

This white paper outlines how the right ERP and Manufacturing Execution System (MES) solution contains ease-of-use and value for manufacturers. You'll discover how the Plex Manufacturing Cloud improves usability through:

- Consistent design and security features.
- Reduced burden of manual data entry.
- Simplified communications with other systems, partners, and devices.

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User-Friendly and Intuitive Design

One of the most over-used expressions in the computer and software industry is “user friendly.” It’s a relative term, of course, because what’s easy for one user might be totally incomprehensible to another. Intuitive is another term that’s equally abused. Solution providers use these terms because they resonate—how difficult a technical system is to learn and use is a major concern.

What you want to look for is a system that is as approachable and familiar as possible. For example, for the last few decades many solutions or websites have had a Microsoft Office “look and feel” including drop-down lists, question marks for help, or magnifying glass icons. Most business users know how to click on the magnifying glass to search for something or do sorts, calculations, totals, and more in Excel spreadsheets.

For the systems that support your manufacturing operations, it should be easy for a new user to learn how to work in the system and get the information they need. The overall design of displays must be consistent across the entire system. If a new user is introduced to inventory screens, icons, and tools and then moves to production control, those screens and functions should be familiar and work the same way. This is what enables the user to focus on function, not the mechanics of the screens.

Consistency also applies to security, access, and controls. There should be one sign-on, with access controls by role so users can get to where they need to be without additional entries or codes. Those same controls ensure that only appropriate individuals with appropriate roles have access to sensitive information.

Your ERP and MES system should be designed the same way with clear, familiar, and consistent screens, icons, and tools. A system like the Plex Manufacturing Cloud combines both ERP and MES functions for manufacturing users that are intuitive and sophisticated for businesses with one or multiple plants around the globe.

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Reducing Manual Data Entry

Reducing manual data entry is the most effective way to preserve resources right from the beginning. It's also lean and efficient. Automated data collection is much timelier than manual entry, and is more accurate—which is critical to ensuring the status of operations at any given point in time.

Most MES solutions are made of a loosely integrated collection of separate functions. The Plex Manufacturing Cloud synchronizes them into one system built to directly tie to shop floor controllers for machine-to-machine communications. Sensors and programmable logic controllers (PLCs) report activity and measurements directly to the ERP system. The system can download schedules and instructions as needed without user intervention. Reporting and communication to and from the shop floor is also simplified with touch screen displays and barcode scanner interfaces.

Simplifying Data Communication

Simplified and automated communications with other systems, partners, and devices enhances the system's ease of use. In several manufacturing industries for example, Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) communications between customers and suppliers is a critical part of day-to-day operations. EDI is a native application within the Plex Manufacturing Cloud, meaning there is no integration or interfacing with a separate EDI package necessary. Information and templates for many trading partners are pre-populated, making for simple setup and rapid communication. Since ERP, MES, and EDI functions are contained within the same cloud-based solution, there are no linkages to maintain and manage. Users don't need to be concerned with the technical details or routine operational requirements.

The Plex Manufacturing Cloud system is designed in a web services environment with XML-based messaging for inbound and outbound data exchange making interchange across the plant, supply chain, and the globe fast and reliable. Data is transferred without delays or errors from manual intervention.

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Enabling a Mobile Experience

The ability to deliver the same experience on a workstation screen, desktop computer, and mobile device goes a long way toward creating an easy-to-use system.

More users are comfortable with using sophisticated features on their mobile devices, even systems that were once bound to a physical site.

Plex Mobile, a user role-based mobile app, extends the Plex Manufacturing Cloud experience. Shop floor users can manage receivables and inventory moves while on the go, untethered from legacy shop floor workstations. With large, easy to read, touch-screen friendly buttons logically grouped by process and function, a user can immediately begin using Plex without a steep learning curve.

Is Your ERP or MES Software Friendly Enough?

If your current systems aren't "user friendly," consider one built exclusively for your manufacturing company, with your processes in mind. Consider a system designed for single sign-on access control security with a consistent, familiar look-and-feel that includes communication capabilities for both inside your plant and outside with your suppliers. The Plex Manufacturing Cloud delivers ERP, MES, and EDI functions for manufacturing users that are intuitive and sophisticated yet easy to use so you users can focus on their jobs, continual improvement, and customer satisfaction instead of figuring out how to use the software.

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About Plex

Plex is the Manufacturing Cloud, delivering industry-leading ERP and manufacturing automation to nearly 600 companies across process and discrete industries. Plex pioneered cloud solutions for the shop floor, connecting suppliers, machines, people, systems, and customers with capabilities that are easy to configure, deliver continuous innovation, and reduce IT costs. With insight that starts on the production line, Plex helps companies see and understand every aspect of their business ecosystems, enabling them to lead in ever-changing markets. Learn more at www.plex.com.