CLIENT INTERVIEW

User Gives Insight Into Timer Pro' Value as a Continuous Improvement Tool

We sat down with Justin to learn about his team's experience with evaluating and ultimately onboarding Timer Pro. "It's a great tool for us. The software is very comprehensive. It quickly helps to streamline processes and improve workflow outcomes. We are very pleased with the results and benefits."

ACS: Thank you, Justin, for taking the time to interview with us today. We would love to learn about your experience with evaluating and ultimately onboarding Timer Pro. First, could you tell me a little bit about your business as well as some of the challenges that you were facing which directed you to Timer Pro?

Justin: Our Ohio-based facility is where this journey with Timer Pro launched. One of your emails found its way into my inbox and I had a little bit of time that day to 'chase the squirrel.' The reason I was even interested at all is because we have a high mix, low volume environment here with a lot of different processes and varied work content.

Like a lot of businesses, we have a seasoned workforce which also includes many new hires as a result of our growth. This creates a pain point with the transition of skill sets and knowledge gaps and where we run off of a lot of tribal knowledge being passed down. We really wanted to close the gap from a training point of view to give our associates the information they need at the times that they need it most.

We also want to tighten our cost controls and understand the labor content that goes into our products and identify areas for improvement.

We use a lot of lean methodology. We follow the Hoshin Kanri annual multi-year planning cycle, coupled with many of the lean tools including Kaizen. So having a more visual way to convey our processes was a gap we knew we had. Also, understanding the total work content of a given piece was an area where we had gaps.

ACS: What were the first steps you took to learn about all Timer Pro has to offer?

Justin: Watching the help videos in the training library on your website was helpful for me to understand all that is included in Timer Pro. I was able to easily find the videos on the functions I was interested in and then investigate on my own without having to talk to someone from ACS. I got a feel for what the software had to offer and could easily see if it was something that met our needs. Your website's been great for that and I've appreciated each step of communication from the first contact through order processing. I'm still using the training library all of the time.

During the trial period, I was trying to generate work instructions for standard work and video storyboards to see if this was something that we were going to want to do and to have something tangible to send along with the Capital Expenditure request. The ACS team has been helpful in answering all my questions and working with me through IT bugs and bumps as we go. Also, I was doing things that were not quite the way the Timer Pro macros were expecting and ACS helped to figure out good solutions to keep us moving.

Our biggest pain point that we've experienced with ramping up Timer Pro is meshing what our IT landscape looks like, how our IT prefers to store files, and how that coordinates with how Timer Pro is designed for local and OneDrive storage. We've had meetings to bridge that gap and I have confidence that we will find a solution. It's primarily about getting our corporate IT on the same page with what ACS envisions the end-user is doing and making sure we are in sync.

ACS: Can you point to a strong business case for Timer Pro?

Yes, our main ROI is going to be the ability to define our current state quickly. We have, conservatively estimating, 40 different product families just in our Ohio facility. Our New Jersey facility probably has the equivalent. For each one of those, there are a lot of similarities but also variability in the processes. This causes a lot of confusion out on the floor when someone is told to, "just do that" because there is not a single document to describe the actual process – it's just the way we have always done it.

With Timer Pro, we're going to be able to film the processes and very quickly establish accurate standard work. So far, our processes have been a manual, brute force method using a basic Excel template. We take the videos and hover the cursor over to create timestamp for the start and end of the process. So, using Timer Pro to do that video breakdown is magnitudes faster. It would probably take 1 to 1.5 days for an Area Lead or Manufacturing Engineer to review the film but with Timer Pro it can now be done in the amount of time that it took to take the film in the first place. Using the built-in controls, you can increase the video playback to really cut down the amount of time it takes to isolate the video clips.

Another big synergy and valuable ROI is the consistency that Timer Pro builds. You take the isolated video clip and Timer Pro automatically carries all the notes and comments through each phase: balance, work instruction and digital standard work. Now you have consistency in the verbiage and how it's presented to the operator and the engineer. In the past, things may have been named differently depending on which department was doing the naming. So being able to get everyone on the same page is going to be a big value-add for us.

We see another big opportunity for an ROI on the training side. Once we have content created and out on the floor, instead of needing a new associate to be on the hip of one of our seasoned associates (which essentially enables only one of them to be working), we can take the training wheels off a lot faster. We can direct the trainees to the exact videos that present their work content and let them watch. Then, if needed, they can ask the senior associates for the remaining help they might need. That way senior associates are producing at their normal rate through most of that training period.

ACS: Speaking of training, how was your training experience with us? Did you get everything you needed?

Justin: As I mentioned, the video library has been very effective. And then the personalized training with Doug has been excellent. I think, for me, the live online group training didn't benefit me as much because the recording of those sessions was perfect for me. And honestly, I'm also relatively computer literate and pick things up quickly but it's a testament to the software, and to the videos, that I was able to do so with ease.

It was really the custom training where you helped us the most to get through the various hurdles we had. I kept a list of questions and issues and would schedule time for individual sessions with ACS to go over and find solutions. During these sessions, we found a couple of things that were opportunities for improvement.

This is a cool thing that I thought was great customer service. In our discussions on how we were going to be using the system since we have small batches and longer operations, we discovered a couple of features that we wanted to utilize that weren't in the system.

ACS acted immediately on the requests and has already rolled out one of them. They added the additional note field so that we could put the notes from the balance directly into the work instructions.

Now, when the work instructions are generated, the notes, like a lot of the other information, get pulled over. So that was a feature that wasn't in the software that they added in very quickly — in just a week.

We had another enhancement suggestion. Instead of extracting a separate video clip for every activity in the work instructions, we wanted to pick a start and end time within the video and extract just that piece for training purposes. Not only will this make our video file sizes a lot smaller, it will make it a lot easier for the operator to navigate and find the specific content they need.

For example, we have an operation that was repetitive, loading the units into a piece of tooling. It's a highly dexterous process using tweezers in both hands. There's a certain way you want to pass the part from one tweezer to the other. So, we wanted to have a video of that shows just a few cycles of this operation— not the 50 that were recorded.

Now, instead of having the whole work content in my work instruction, I can just show the first cycles of 10 or 15 seconds and save disk storage as well. The operator can put that clip on a loop as opposed to viewing a whole five-minute video of the parts being loaded. We won't lose the full content – it is still in the balance when we look at optimization. That's going to be a very useful feature.

ACS: How important is digitizing your standard work?

Justin: The digitizing benefits in Timer Pro are really important to help us take that next step and give our operators a reason to use their computers as opposed to just printing everything out and having their own stash of notes.

Our current process is very paper-driven, We have big printed BOMs that are 10 pages long. Associates flip through to find the needed documents that then had to be typed into a search engine to get the drawing pulled up. The training documents weren't available or present, and if they were, it was one of those things where they were hard to access.

So, we put some infrastructure in place. Now 90-95% of our workstations have a touchscreen monitor available and we're really pushing toward accessing drawings, routers, training instructions and anything else they need electronically in real-time. So yes; we're not just getting everything electronic, but we're getting everything electronic in a way that helps our operators be more efficient and makes their job easier.

ACS: Did we make it easy for you to purchase Timer Pro?

Justin: I think the process was pretty good. The access that ACS granted to the software is amazing. You can't get any better than 100% access to the software for 30-45 days. You even let me extend the eval period a little bit because we were going through the approval processes. On top of that, having access to some of the different sample storyboards with stock videos was helpful to be able to show someone the process and what the Timer Pro output looks like. I think honestly, the only part that I've had any friction with this process is the IT side, and like I said, hopefully, that's going to get resolved as that is an internal issue.

ACS: Last question: what would you say to a company that's considering Timer Pro?

Justin: My recommendation would be if you're ready to invest the time and energy into producing good standard work content to really understand your process, Timer Pro is a great tool. It's like anything — it's a tool, so it's going to be on you, at the end of the day, to utilize it appropriately. But the time savings and the power behind having all of these different kinds of cross-functional areas under one software is really valuable. ▮