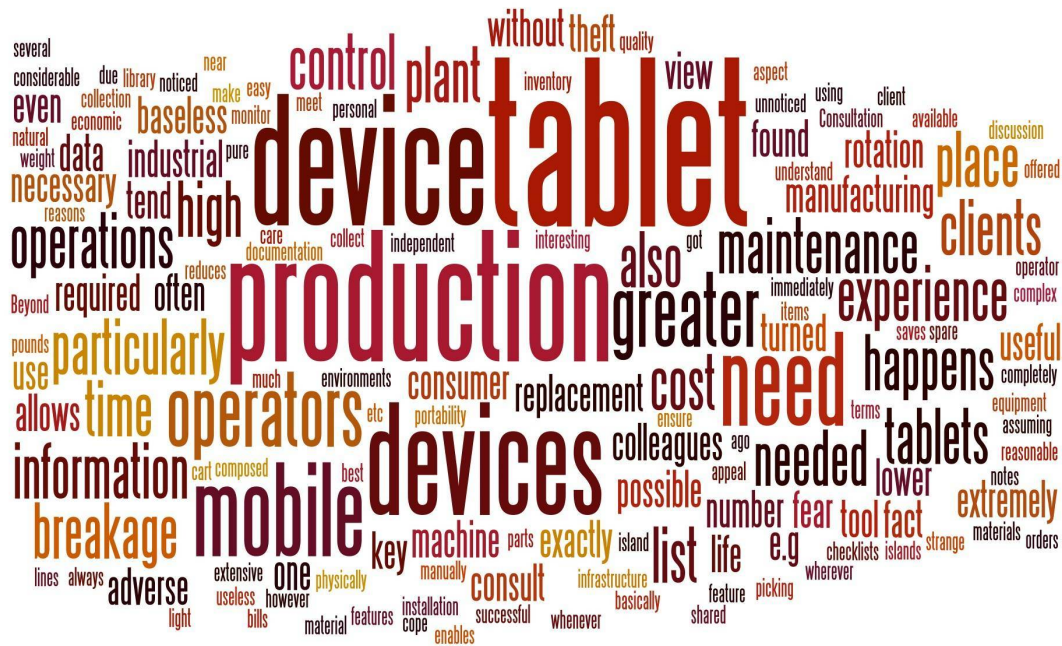




3 Reasons to Use Mobile Technology in Manufacturing

BY LUIGI DE BERNARDINI | MON AUG 25 2014

About 10 years ago, when we first offered industrial tablets to our clients for production management or maintenance activities, the response we got was almost always indifferent, if not clearly adverse. We were only successful in recommending tablets when the tablet proposal was buried in a complex and articulated supply list, where it went unnoticed. The client then found himself with this strange device that he initially believed to be useless. In a

short time, however, these clients found the tablet to be a key element of their operations.

Today, generally adverse perceptions of mobile technology in manufacturing has changed. As often happens, what becomes an indispensable tool in private life is expected to be naturally available in the workplace. This is one of the reasons why manufacturing is increasingly demanding mobile devices to allow operators and managers to stay connected and completely in control of what happens in the plant at any time and in any place. Beyond pure mobility, there are important aspects of mobile devices that make them particularly interesting and useful in production environments. Following are three key advantages we have noticed when it comes to using consumer tablets in operations.

The fear that there would be a high rotation of devices because of breakage or theft has, in my experience, turned out to be baseless.

Portability

The tablet, with its light weight and ease of use, is the best tool and the most natural replacement for paper. It is extremely effective whenever it is necessary to consult lists (e.g., production orders, picking list of inventory items, bills of material, the list of maintenance operations to be done, etc.) or where operators are required to manually collect data or information or fill in the appropriate form (such as checklists for quality control).

The tablet allows the user to easily view, from any location within the plant, the status and production data of each machine, and insert notes that can be immediately shared with colleagues wherever they are. From the tablet it is possible to consult guides, manuals, mechanical and electrical schematics directly where they are needed, essentially allowing an operator to bring an entire library of reference materials without bringing a cart filled with several pounds of documentation.

One aspect not to be underestimated is the fact that having these features on a mobile device also enables a "social" function. Consultation and discussion with colleagues can take place without the need to physically meet.

Availability

The tablet is particularly useful and flexible for production departments composed of multiple islands or independent machines, or when the production lines are particularly extensive.

The tablet allows a plant to avoid the installation of fixed supervisory and control stations (with considerable savings in terms of equipment and infrastructure) and still ensure that operators are able to receive or enter the necessary information for the production, exactly where they need to, e.g., near each island, machine or portion of a line.

This not only has an economic impact from an architectural point of view and the number of devices needed, but it also makes possible the collection or consultation of information exactly in the place where it's needed. This reduces the waste of time and risk of errors.

Affordability

The cost of a consumer tablet is much smaller than that of any similar mobile industrial device. This is true even assuming a greater need for accessories, the need for increased storage capacity or the need for spare parts to cope with accidental breakage. If one considers that a modern device, with extremely high performance, has a cost basically equivalent, if not lower, than the combination of PC plus monitor, and that the required number of devices, due to its feature of portability, is lower, it is easy to understand how the use of tablet often saves money.

Based on the experience of our clients, even the cost of maintenance or replacement is reasonable. The fear that there would be a high rotation of devices because of breakage or theft has, in our experience, turned out to be baseless. In fact, what happens is that, because of the tablet's appeal, operators tend to pay greater attention to this type of device than to others. They also tend to have greater care for the device and develop a greater sense of personal property, which translates into a longer device life.

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