# Factors to Consider when Purchasing door/frame/hardware Distributor software

SfH

SOFTWARE FOR HARDWARE

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# INTRODUCTION

All businesses, door/frame/hardware distributors included, strive for the same goal. Create loyal customers and operate a profitable and growing business. Creating loyal customers requires delivering your products and services as promised, professionally, on budget and on-time. Creating a profitable business means running an efficient operation and regularly landing new jobs. Creating a growing business requires processes that can be scaled to support increased job activity and increased staff. Future minded door/frame/hardware distributors invest in automation software for all of these reasons.

Automation software enables door/frame/hardware distributors to easily quote large jobs, manage projects, track inventory and oversee the financials. However, automation software requires a significant investment; hence, making the right purchase that best fits your business becomes critically important.

This white paper will help you make the right software purchase decision and minimize your investment costs. The key consideration factors when evaluating software solutions fall into four main categories: Ease of Use, Functionality, Support, and Financial Impact. This paper examines each of these categories in detail to help you smartly evaluate your options and make the right decision to power your business for the future.

*"Simply going with software that's considered industry standard can be a big mistake if it doesn't fit company needs"*

- **Andrew Schrage, Founder of *Money Crashers*.**

# EASE OF USE

Not all door/frame/hardware distributors, owners and staff possess prior software technology experience.  Consequently, your first factor to consider in purchasing software is the "Ease of Use" factor.  Is the software organized in a logical fashion, easy to learn, and easy to operate?  Did the developers design the software with any prior door/frame/hardware industry experience?  Or, was the software created by a team of millennial programmers with no understanding of your business and your customers?

## Demand a Real Trial

A skilled salesman performing a slick demo can make any software seem easy to use.  Never purchase important business software based on just a snazzy demo.  Demand a real trial of the real software with your real job data.  Most software companies sell their product by demo and only focus on the high points.  Would you buy a car by only sitting in the showroom model?  Don't fall for "smoke and mirrors" of slick demos.  Ask the vendor for a full free trial of the product at least for 7 days.

> *Demand a real trial of the real software with your real job data.*

## Automatic Updates

Ease of Use involves not just the day-to-day operating of the software but also the method for updating the software and the price catalogs.  A few of the companies that provide software for this industry provide a way for this to happen automatically without the need for user intervention.  Look for a system that auto-updates overnight so you always know that you have the latest software and price book updates every morning when you login.

## Integrated Price Books

To quickly and easily produce a bid, the software must contain the current list prices of the products used in the job.  These price books should also contain the desired cutsheets for each product.  Integrated price books enormously increase your ease of use and enable you to quickly do a take-off on large and complex jobs.

Buyers often confuse ease of use with pretty screen design or gimmicky onscreen wizards.  Ease of use means that the software works the way you do your job.  To some degree, the software should provide you a methodology for running your business so that practices and procedures are followed in an organized and consistent manner.  This enables you to easily scale your business for more employees, more customers and more jobs.

As ease of use declines, time to productivity greatly increases

Ease of Use

Time to productivity
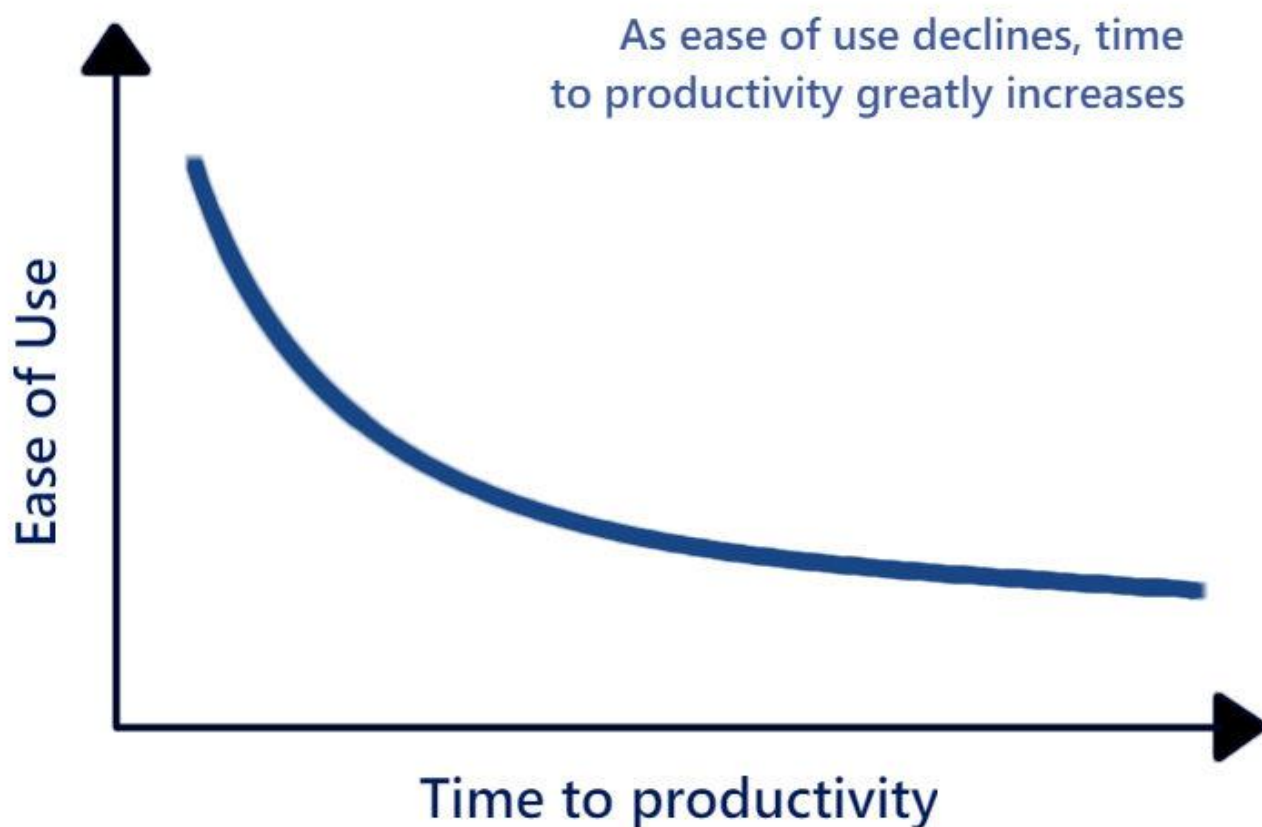
# FUNCTIONALITY

Yes, ease of use is critically important. However, you also need dozens of specific features and functions from your software platform. Like *Baskin-Robbins®,* this white paper addresses 31 specific functions your software should deliver.

## Win and Manage Jobs

These specific features enable you to better respond to customers, prepare professional bids, and win more jobs.

1. **Contact Database** – Easily access all your customer and prospect contact information in one database. Architects, customers, manufacturers, wholesalers, installers, everyone you work with, buy from or sell to, all easily accessible. Don't waste money purchasing outside software.

2. **Integrated Price Books** – The software should automatically integrate and update the door, frame, hardware and accessory price books that you need.

3. **Manual Price Book Entry** – Your software needs to enable you to manually enter and specify manufacturer and product information if necessary.

4. **Request for Quote** – Any software package that you choose must allow you to estimate a contract job. The software should be able to quickly produce a Request for Quote which can be sent to your supplier(s) for a quoted price.
   These quotes should have all like items grouped together with associated quantities. In the case of doors, frames and pre-hung units, this report would also identify all hardware preps required in addition to any required lite/louver kit cutouts.

5. **Price Estimate Reports** – Easy-to-generate detailed price list of all doors, frames, hardware items and accessories used on a job. Door and Frame reports also show the cost of manufacturer preps and "our shop" preps when applicable. Detailed and easy to read report allows for quick, accurate review before submittal.

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6. **Submittal Bid Sheet** – Create summarized pricing for a job. Custom notes can be easily added. Quickly produce concise, professional bid sheets for your customers.

7. **Sales Orders/Proposals** – Some jobs may not require a submittal package. If so, your software should provide an easy to use sales order process. Similar to adding items to an online "shopping cart" with one click you can turn a Sales Proposal into a Sales Order. This process allows you to easily make over-the-counter sales without creating a contract job.

8. **Total Job Bid Report** – For contract job bids, you need software that produces a summarized report by sub-division categories. For example, hollow metal doors/frames, wood doors, pre-hung units, finish hardware, division 10, installation labor, etc. The software should produce a report with an approval signature section and allow you to enter your own job qualifications and exclusions.

9. **Submittal Package/Shop Drawings** – A full submittal package typically includes a hardware schedule with cutsheets and a door/frame schedule with door/frame elevation drawings. If your job includes division 10 items, the software should produce a specific division 10 schedule. Also include your company logo inserted on all customer reports.

10. **Job Areas** – By creating Areas, you can break a contract job down by building, floor, phase or any other category that you may choose. Produce reports or Purchase Orders, Picking Tickets or Packing Slips only for a particular part of the job.

11. **Job Correspondence** – In order to respond quickly and professionally to customer inquiries, the software should track RFIs, Transmittals, and miscellaneous correspondence documents for every contract job.

12. **Job Site Info** – Also related to responding quickly and professionally to customers, all job site information including phone numbers, special delivery instructions and directions should be easily accessible.

*Better respond to customers, prepare professional bids, and win more jobs.*

# Increase Staff Productivity

These features enable you to increase the efficiency and scalability of your business.

13. **Inventory Control** – Inventory is not just an accounting function and many benefits arise from having inventory control as part of your software automation platform. For example, a customer calls for a specific product, no need to physically walk the warehouse. Rather, immediately look it up in your software system. The best packages will track on-hand quantity, committed quantity and on-order quantity. Another benefit, a "master list" of products, enables you to pick from this to add products to your jobs or sales orders.

14. **QR Code Integration** – Look for software that supports inventory control via bar codes or QR codes to facilitate inventory management directly into the software. The software enables printing of adhesive QR Code or bar code labels for every product in your inventory. View item details and update inventory counts from any smart phone simply by scanning these codes. Instantly view product details while in the warehouse and efficiently verify and update your inventory counts.

15. **Inventory & Non-Stock Databases** – Automatically build a library of doors, frames, hardware and accessories as you add these products to a job or sales order. Save time when creating jobs and sales orders by reusing these items from the database.

16. **Division 10 Products** – If you are supplying bathroom accessories and toilet partitions, the software you choose must give you the ability to include these items in a job or sales order. In order to do this, you will need to be able to create room numbers and then associate the various accessories to a particular restroom.

17. **Installation** – More common today, door/frame/hardware distributors also bid and provide the installation of the products they sell. Your software should allow you to define an install plan and specify the labor hours to complete the installation. A robust package also enables miscellaneous categories for installation related expenses as well as assigning different labor rates and markups by job. In addition, look for the ability to produce installer's reports which tell the installers exactly what to do and also give supervisors the ability to track progress.

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18. **Adhesive Labeling of Products** – When you are preparing to ship products to your customer you will often want this material labeled with a tag# for product installation. A good software package will create labels that include a full product description as well as the tag#. It will allow you to produce these adhesive labels for every product called for in the job.

19. **Shop Fabrication Reports** – If your company preps doors and frames in your own shop, then you need a software package that will produce shop work orders. These reports need to group together like items based on the attributes of the doors/frames, the preps being done to these doors/frames and the fire labeling required to be placed on these products. These reports should list the tag#s that apply to each grouping of doors/frames and also tell the shop when these products are needed.

20. **Pre-hung Door Units** – For distributors doing high rise or assisted living centers, your software solution must support the use of pre-hung door units. Sophisticated software packages will even allow you to create a pre-hangers hardware set in addition to the normal commercial hardware set for these pre-hung openings.

21. **Areas** – When you need to "break down" a job by floor, phase, interior/exterior, etc. for pricing, ordering or delivery purposes, the software you choose should be able to support this feature for accessories, doors, frames and hardware.

22. **Archiving** – Once you complete a job or sales order, it is desirable to move these jobs or orders out of "work in progress" jobs/orders and into an archive database. Robust packages will allow you to view/print archived jobs/orders and un-archive them if necessary.

23. **Picking Tickets & Packing Slips** – Easily generate picking tickets to pull stock material for both contract jobs and sales orders. Packing Slips can be created for all of the material being delivered to the job site. Adhesive labels can be printed to label all products going to the job site. Save time and reduce errors when managing jobs and sales orders.

*Equip your staff with the tools they need for high productivity*

24. **Schedule Creator** – Produce Door/Frame, Hardware and Division 10 schedules. Preamble and note pages can be attached to each schedule and the Door/Frame Schedule should also include elevation drawings. Easily create and print complex schedules.

25. **Door, Frame and Pre-hung Fabrication Reports** – Create reports that group together all like doors, frames or pre-hungs found in a contract job. These reports provide all of the details needed for your shop to deliver the material required on the job. Your software should produce reports that identify all required preps, fire labels and accessories for the doors, frames and pre-hungs being delivered to the job. Help your shop meet delivery dates efficiently and accurately as you coordinate the preps and materials needed for complex jobs.

26. **Change Orders** – Clients request changes, often numerous times after the initial approval. Your software should produce and track change orders. Robust software packages allow you to create purchase orders directly from the change orders and support cutsheets and elevation drawings.

27. **Purchase Orders** – Instantly create purchase orders with one-click from a Contract Job or Sales Order. Save time, reduce errors and save costs. Easily track all your purchases.

*"Scalability – what is needed to fully exploit sustained periods of growth with minimal risk and disruption to the company."*

- **Gordon Daugherty, Managing Director of** *Capital Factory*

## Increase Profitability

These features help identify areas that can improve the bottom line financials of your business.

28. **"Combo" Purchase Orders** – Combine stock, job or sales order POs into a single purchase order.  Easily find the best POs to combine going to the same supplier to save money on freight charges, gain greater discounts, and help you meet minimum order quantities.

29. **Archive Jobs and Sales Orders** – Clear out old jobs and sales orders by archiving them into a separate database.  Keep your database fast, organized, and clutter-free while still retaining access to past jobs/orders if necessary.

30. **Unbilled Purchase Order Report** – Identify material that has been purchased but never billed to client thereby generating revenue.

31. **Profitability Reporting** – Critical to increasing your business profitability is tracking profit by job and by salesperson.  Your software should provide immediate access to the data you need to manage and grow your business.

*"Average payback for investment in workflow automation software was 10.5 months with a 3 year ROI of 176%."*

- "Total Impact of Workflow Automation Solutions"

*Forrester Research*, January 2015

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# SUPPORT

Purchasing business automation software is not a one and done event. You are entering into a long term relationship with your software vendor. If the software suits your business needs, and supports your business growth, you may be using the software for decades. Hence, you need to carefully assess the software company and their ability to support your business for many, many years. Ask about these following key areas.

## Technical Support Response

Can the company respond to your requests quickly? When you encounter a problem, while on deadline to submit your bid, will the vendor immediately answer the phone and help you? If your issue involves a "How do I?" question, you should receive same day help, ideally same hour or immediate. Some issues may involve a software fix which could be quick or require days. Either way, your vendor should keep you informed as to the progress of the fix.

## Technical Support Capability

Are the support staff native English speakers? Many firms outsource support to overseas firms. Ask the tenure of the tech support staff and their ability to resolve matters. Strong tech support staffs should be able to resolve the vast majority of all inbound support requests quickly, same day. However, for stickier product issues, the company should provide you direct access to Level 2 technical assistance.

## Training

Definitely inquire about initial training and whether your license fee includes the initial training. Many vendors charge additionally for training, often several thousand dollars. Training can quickly get you and your staff up and running. The best training option should always be on-site, hands-on, live training. Some vendors charge significantly for this type of training but it will benefit you and your staff in the long run. Live webinar training is your second best option as it enables real-time interaction but it's often not hands-on. If you choose to initially not elect in-person live training, do ask the vendor if they even provide that option. You may discover later, maybe as you hire new employees, an in-person live training makes sense down the road.

## Future Enhancements

Software continually evolves and improves with technology developments but more importantly with customer input. Ask the vendor how they incorporate customer feedback into the product development process. Many vendors do not allow your direct customer input, or they only allow input from select large customers. Ask if the software company offers a user conference where you can receive training, give feedback and socialize with others in the industry.

# FINANCIAL IMPACT

Regardless of all the great potential that software automation can provide your door/frame/hardware business, one fact always remains true - software costs money.  Hence, you need to feel confident that your software expenditure will produce real financial results.

## Return on Investment

If you purchase the right distribution software package, you should be able to increase productivity tremendously vs manual processes like Excel and Word.  Automation software investment should enable your business to handle larger jobs, make fewer mistakes, and easily manage the myriad of changes that most jobs involve.  Larger jobs, more jobs, and fewer mistakes translate into revenue and profit.  Take the time to review your past jobs and quantitatively determine the costs you incurred due to human errors and the potential jobs you didn't win.

## Job and Sales Person Profitability

Your software should allow you to determine job profitability at any point along the way.  Winning a bid often comes down to slim margins and producing an accurate bid is critical.  In addition, your software package should be able to produce a sales person profitability report for any time period that you choose.

> *Your software should allow you to determine job profitability at any point along the way.*

## Integrated Price Books

In order for any software package to be able to quickly produce a bid, it must contain the list prices of the products that are being used in the job. Importantly, you need to know that you are always using the most up-to-date current pricing. Using outdated pricing can cause you to underbid a job.

## Interface to Accounting Systems

While not the most glamorous aspect of your software platform, the integration of your inventory, purchase orders and invoices into your accounting system dramatically improves efficiency and reduces potential errors in invoicing and collections.
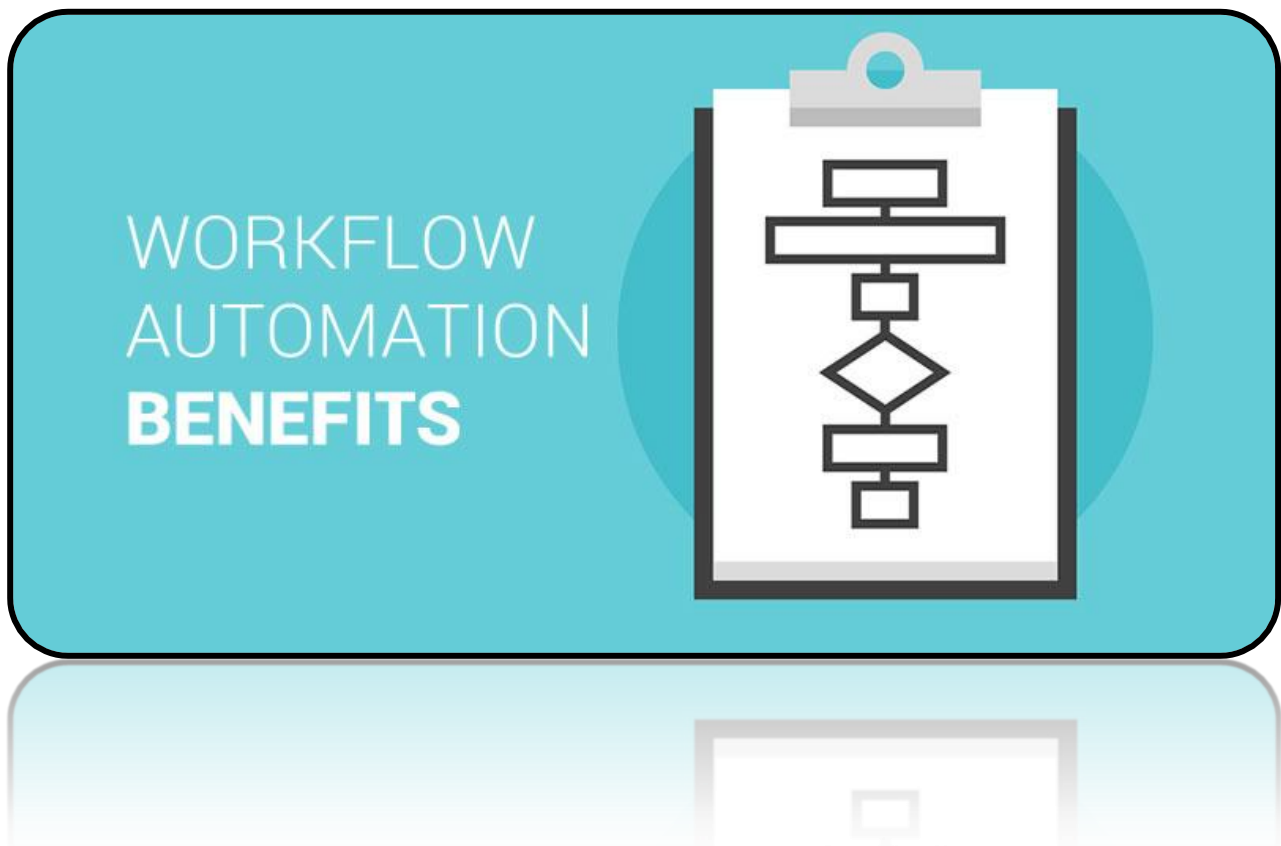
# WHY SPEND THE MONEY?

The old adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," holds a lot of real truth. You operate a profitable door/frame/hardware distributor business and all seems to be running just fine. So why purchase software? Why create new risks?

- Risk that it won't produce the expected benefits.
- Risk that it may be hard to learn.
- Risk of a new expense.

We wrote this white paper based on over 22 years of experience serving door/frame/hardware distributors. The information contained in this paper not only will help you dramatically reduce the risks but also dramatically increase your odds of success. The three keys to leveraging software to grow your business are:

1. Purchase software that addresses the 31 functionality requirements outlined in this paper.

2. Purchase from a company that provides the best Support and Training in the industry.

3. Purchase the most value priced software in the industry.

*Software for Hardware* provides these three keys. As proof, in our 22 year history, only three *Software for Hardware* clients have chosen to use a competitor's software.

Implementing automation with *Software for Hardware* will help you:

## Reduce Errors and Costs

Minimize manual and human error that costs precious time, resources, and dollars.

## Create Employee Success

A Workflow Automation Platform helps employees succeed. Elimination of repetitive and manual processes motivates employees and allows them to focus on more important tasks which, in turn, boosts morale, enhances innovation, and creates loyal clients.

## Improve Operations Visibility

Management visibility and real-time reporting improves with software based workflow automation. Any employee can see another employee's jobs which enables easy coverage when a staffer is out sick.

## Expand Your Business

Old manual processes limit any business's ability to scale. Workflow Automation opens up your ability to bid for bigger jobs and creates higher productivity to serve more customers with your existing staff.

*Software for Hardware* works every day to help door/frame/hardware distributors realize these benefits and put their businesses on the path to efficiency and profitable growth.

For more details, visit our website at www.softwareforhardware.com or contact us at info@softwareforhardware.com or 770-945-2463.