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Efficiency Handbook: 5 Steps to **Improve** your Business **Efficiency**
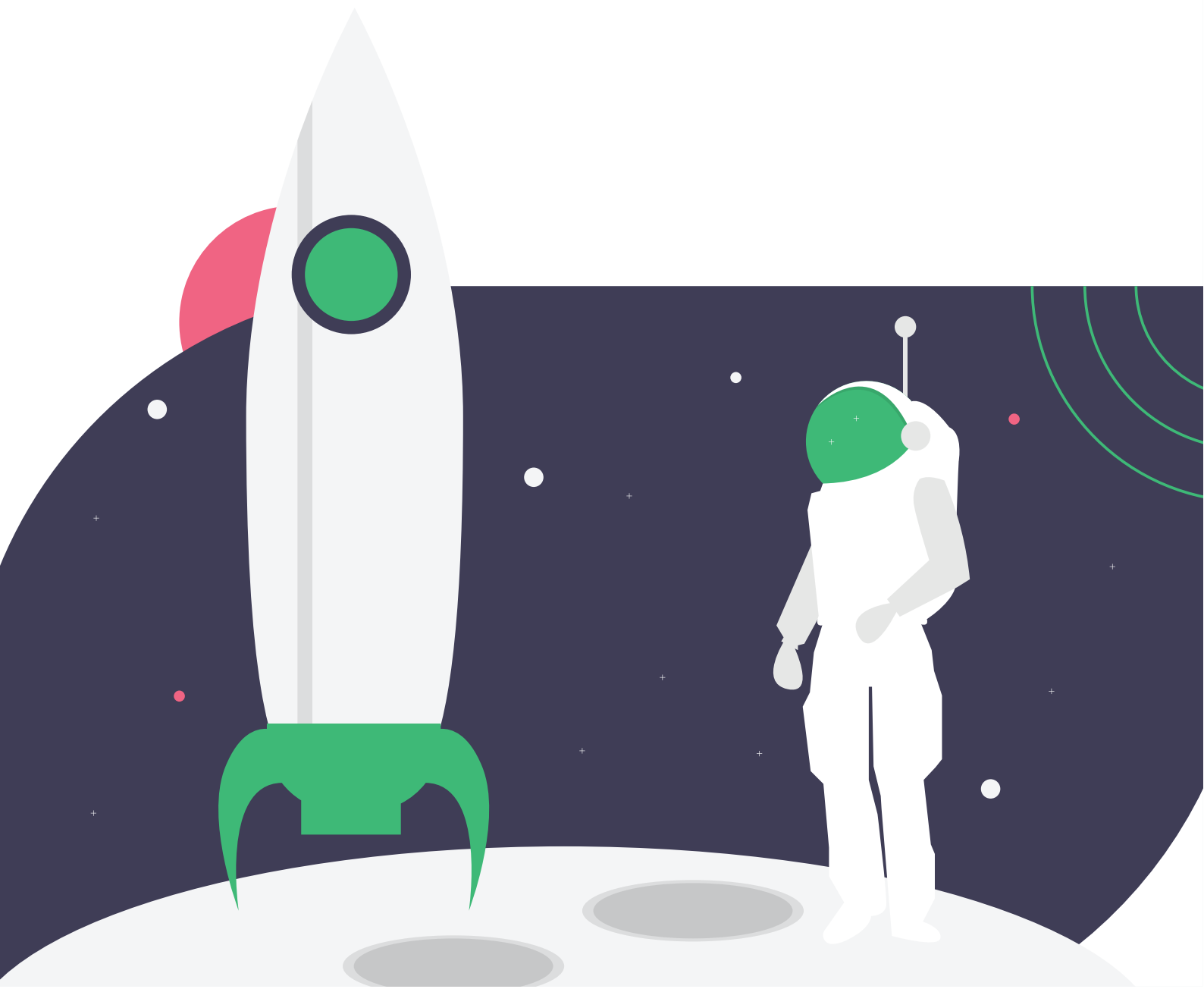
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INTRODUCTION

If you're looking for ways to improve your business efficiency, you've come to the right place. Clarity Software are experts in helping businesses maximise their resources and get the most from how they already work. We're not about reinventing the wheel. Clarity Software is here to support how you work, maximising your potential and creating new opportunities for efficiency that you might not be aware of.

In this guide, you'll find helpful advice on straightforward ways to make your working days more efficient. No need for fancy new equipment, expensive training or three-day consultancy workshops - we know that some of the best solutions are the easiest and simplest to put into practice.

You can also explore our Efficiency Calculator. This handy tool helps you work out the ROI and impact that using Clarity Software could have for your business with just a few steps. We're all about ensuring you get the most from your business and the money you put into it, and our Efficiency Calculator is designed to show you exactly how to get started.

STEP 1 - TIME MANAGEMENT

We've all heard the phrase 'time is money', but so often we find the days running away with us. Whether you're held up by internal communications, client sign off processes, machinery downtime or delayed delivery, when time is used inefficiently there's nothing more frustrating.

A huge part of our work as software providers is helping people take control of their time management to improve their overall work efficiency. Clarity Software can help speed up processes that previously might have taken up huge chunks of time such as:

Staff timekeeping
Previous methods: Timestamps, timesheets, punch cards - any manual entry method.

Cons: Too slow, not suitable for staff who work across multiple locations, easily lost/missed data. One more thing to remember in an already busy day.

Now: All in one software logs time as well as being a key part of how staff do their jobs. Automatic time logs, data collection for reviewing work efficiency, improved employee independence and autonomy.

Job sign off and progression
Previous methods: Telephone calls, sign off in person, manually moving relevant documents between stations, tracking multiple email chains and people through the sign off process.

Cons: Too slow for quick sign off, hold ups in communications, large amount of room for human error or differences of opinion in sign off, information easily lost.

Now: PDF and e-sign off, all documents in one central access system, complete version control, secure information storage and faster sign off.

Work and Activity Planning

Previous methods: Central work board or shift sheets, daily task sheets or email bulletins, data entry planning for job schedules.

Cons: Not responsive to quick changes in scheduling, not reflective of downtime or delays/openings in production, removes autonomy from staff, relies on a few staff to distribute and lack of contingency plan in absence.

Now: Central online job board and activity planner, quickly react to changes in scheduling, allow full visibility 100% of the time, easier handover between shifts thanks to centralised information and updates. Can be linked to other key areas of the business such as stock and inventory for maximum efficiency in working.

Clarity Software provides the latest solutions in consolidating information and helping you get the most from the time you have in your day. By having centralised and reactive systems, you can avoid issues around machine downtime, delayed sign off and poor communication while maximising the time available.

SECTION 2 - WORKFLOW EFFICIENCY

We've covered how you can make time = money in the most efficient way possible. Now it's time to look at another classic saying: 'work smarter, not harder'. It's something we hear a lot in the age of digital technology and Industry 4.0, but how can you actually put this into practice?

The key is in the phrase: work smarter. It's all about using smart technology to your advantage and embracing the digital revolution. New technology isn't here to replace your jobs. It's here to make your jobs easier so you can focus on the things that machines can't replace. Your skills, expertise, experience and knowledge are irreplaceable. Don't forget that!

So how can workflow software help you achieve that all-important smart approach to efficient working?

Helping your working day run better

Getting the most from your working day and your employees used to look like a carrot and stick scenario; incentivise your employees and get more work from them. Today, that model doesn't really work anymore. Instead, to encourage employees to work more efficiently, you need to consider:

- Do they feel able to do their jobs without micromanagement?
- Are they empowered to make their own decisions?
- Is there a fair work-life balance?

- Can employees plan their working day around their strengths and deadlines?
- Does your company encourage independent thinking and working?

Employees who feel happy and secure in their work are proven to be more efficient and productive. And it's no wonder. When people are able to take control of their working day, they feel empowered to do better work, organise their day around key tasks and deadlines, and be proactive rather than reactive in their approach.

Getting to this stage means having an efficient workflow pipeline. Good workflow software will organise jobs by material, deadline, location or priority. No more last-minute scrambling because a high priority job was filed incorrectly, and no more running around the workshop on multiple material runs which could have been combined into one picking order. Provide clear, exact instructions about where items are in the production chain, what the status is, who needs to follow up and what actions need to be taken.

Workflow software creates empowered, independent employees who feel in control and responsible for their working day. Even if there are slip-ups (which we all know happen from time to time) it's easier to learn from your mistakes and understand what went wrong and where it went wrong through analysis of the workflow schedules.

A happier employee who knows exactly how their day is structured and what their actions and expectations are is more likely to be productive and efficient with a positive outlook. You can tap into the natural efficiency and energy of your employees while steering things to ensure they get the best working day possible - all thanks to software and smart tech.

Optimising work patterns
Through the magic of algorithms and smart technology, it's possible to work out not just how to help employees work more efficiently, but also when and under what conditions. Workflow software is a huge part of this and helps get the most from people by understanding their individual working preferences.

Rather than you having to sit and analyse reports and put actions into place, workflow software does the heavy lifting for you and gives you options for:

- **Shift patterns** - who works better on what teams? Why do certain teams work together better?
- **Production stations** - are certain employees performing well in certain areas and not others? Is it through lack of training or preference?
- **Delays and downtime** - where is there downtime? Can it be explained and improved on?

While software can't solve all your problems, it can provide you with the data and analysis needed to start making positive changes. Armed with your software data, you can talk to teams frankly about performance and explore new ways to get the best from your team. Maybe someone is keen to train as a specialist, perhaps a manager is itching for a new challenge, is the night shift no longer working for someone due to family changes?

With the software keeping an eye on the productivity and efficiency of how people are working, you can focus on how to improve working conditions for employees, how to generate new leads and sales, and foster new client relationships – skills and work that need a human approach.

SECTION 3 - REMOTE WORKING SOLUTIONS

You've checked off workflow productivity and improved time management - great start! Your business is well on the way to becoming more efficient and getting the most from your employees and resources.

Let's talk about how we can bring efficient and effective working to everyone, everywhere.

Remote working regardless

No matter what the working day throws at you, being able to work whatever happens is important to keep things running smoothly and to the best of your abilities.

While we might think of remote working as primarily working from home, remote working also involves:

- Working from site visits or on location,
- Working on the road, such as while travelling to site visits or conferences,
- Working at other offices your company holds.
- Working at supplier or customer offices.

While we've all likely become familiar with working away from the office (certainly in the last 12 months) remote working solutions show that with today's increasingly connected and global society, it's important to be able to work from anywhere.

So how can we achieve the goal of working from anywhere? How can remote working solutions support in making this a reality (one that really works, with access to servers, internet, online portals, software programmes and key documents no matter what).

Having the right systems in place should make remote working as easy as coming to the office. In an age where we expect interconnectivity from our personal devices, why are workplaces so far behind in adopting solutions that allow access from anywhere?

Choosing the right set up

If you want people to work effectively from anywhere, you need to be giving them the right groundwork and tools to do so.

A crucial part of any successful remote working setup is your document storage solution. No matter

where people are working from, whether it's at home, on-site, or a mixture of the two, they need to be able to access the information that helps them do their job. Sounds straightforward right?

This is one area you must not compromise on when it comes to choosing a system. If you go cheap or not industry-specific, you'll end up with process headaches, impossibly slow connections, and more technical issues than a malfunctioning robot.

Choose a remote working system that can:

- Store key documents like templates for quotes, invoices and client information,
- Communicate with other key business areas such as stock and goods inventory, delivery and logistics, and finances,
- Secure files and sensitive information - both on and off site access,
- Maintain accurate version control for all file and document types,
- Process payments and invoices securely without delay.

By ensuring everyone in your business, no matter what their job is or where they work from, can access what they need exactly when they need it, your business can go beyond the office or home-working set up and truly work from anywhere.

Getting your remote working document solutions right not only frees your employees in terms of how they work, you can also access a wider talent pool for recruiting, diversify your office locations, and expand and grow into new areas you wouldn't expect.

Document storage solutions and remote access software that condenses all these items into one package are essential for realising a more connected and open-working future where business really can be done from anywhere.

SECTION 4 - NESTING, MRP AND STOCK CONTROL SOFTWARE

Finding ways to get the most from your materials and resources is one of the key ways to maximise how efficiently your business performs. If you're working with raw materials and goods to produce finished products, you'll be all too aware of how fluctuating prices, shortages, and lead times can impact your business. Not only do you have to get the materials into the warehouse or shop for processing into orders, once they arrive it's important to get the most from them to avoid unnecessary waste or delays in delivery.

Luckily, there are ways to get the most from every sheet of material so even if prices go up or items are in short supply, you can keep meeting customer orders without compromise. Online stock control and inventory management helps you keep an up-to-date view of stock levels so there's no more rush ordering or piles of stock sitting around.

Software solutions for managing materials and inventory mean you can:

- Reduce material waste and amount sent to landfill,
- Recycle and repurpose offcuts or scrap,
- Condense jobs by material used - no more breaking into a fresh sheet or batch for each job,
- Manage inventory effectively per job - stop accidental overordering and never run out,
- Find ways to add new materials and options to your portfolio without breaking the bank - offering a wider range of products to customers.

Optimising Offcuts

We all know that it's good to reduce waste, recycle materials where we can, and generally do our bit to help the planet out. When it comes to running a business, it's not always so easy to make decisions that might be planet-positive but that are business-negative in terms of time, money and overall effort put in vs. gains.

Making the most of your offcuts and getting as much as possible from every piece of material used in job processing is a key way to improve your efficiency. Maximising the use of your raw materials is also one of the best ways to reduce environmental impact.

Choosing a material resource planning (MRP) software or nesting software will help you improve your use of materials and plan ahead for jobs more effectively. This handy piece of software can calculate how to get the absolute maximum amount of finished product from any resource, as well as the most straightforward warehouse trip for picking materials. By looking at what jobs are planned, what resources are required and how to portion out the raw material, nesting and MRP software works to ensure that there is minimum waste from each job or material processed.

Even better, for the offcuts or scrap that is left over (no matter how small), there are plenty of ways you can turn these into other products for use. You could sell on your scrap to another manufacturer or find a way of processing it in house through a recycling or repurposing method. Not only are you able to make materials more profitable per job, you're reducing waste, environmental impact and maybe even creating new products!

Intelligent Inventory Management

Managing your stock and inventory is as important as how you put it to use. Being aware and in control means you can confidently quote and meet customer deadlines and requirements, stay on top of orders, and no more rushed deliveries or problems with over ordered stock.

When customers can rely on you to have what they need in stock, at reasonable rates and with great lead times, their business becomes repeat business. Managing your stock inventory and goods handling is essential to helping your business run efficiently.

Inventory management software gives you a 360 degree view of what stock you've got in, what's on order, and what's running low. You can sync this insight with your job planning and activities to check

and see how your current jobs on order match up with the stock you've got in.

Quickly see:

- What jobs require which materials,
- What stock is running low - and whether it's in need of reordering for upcoming jobs,
- What stock is already in - and when it's due for use in customer jobs,
- What materials have been in highest demand recently for jobs.

You can even schedule items to automatically reorder when they run below a certain critical level so you know you'll never run out. Take a weight off your employee's minds knowing that stock is managed efficiently, and let them focus on what really matters; creating great products.

Added bonus: Connect your inventory management software with your quoting software. Get complete accuracy on quotes in terms of material type, quantity, purpose and more so you know with 100% certainty that your customer is getting their order exactly.

SECTION 5 - ENERGY USE AND EMISSIONS

At Clarity, we're pretty big on getting businesses to lower their emissions and cut carbon output. It's one of our key values and we're proud to be 'doing our bit' to help protect the planet.

We're so passionate about it in fact, that we're keen to help people realise how easy it is to make climate-positive changes. We're harnessing digital technology solutions to help not only create more efficient ways of working, but to reduce our customers' emissions and energy output at the same time.

Creating Mindset Changes

Approach the way your business uses energy like you would any other area of performance and production. Take a critical eye and ask questions about whether certain practices are best for business or if they're just out of convenience or habit.

For companies looking for ways to reduce their energy use and emissions, start with small shifts:

- Are machines such as computers, printers, and conference video equipment left on standby or turned off after use or at the end of the working day?
- When waiting for orders to be processed, are machines idling?
- Are production machines efficient at processing orders? Could they be serviced, retrofitted or upgraded to be more energy efficient?
- What kinds of business vehicles do you use? Are they fuel-efficient/hybrid/electric?
- Are your heating and cooling systems efficiently managing temperature or left unchecked?
- Are all lights and systems switched off at the end of the working day or when not in use?
- Do you offer any staff incentives to get involved in green schemes like cycle to work or electric charging stations?

Not all changes have to be as dramatic as upgrading your entire vehicle fleet or investing in brand new manufacturing equipment. Small changes add up just as quickly to help save money on energy output, and improve your business efficiency from an energy-performance perspective.

Streamlining with Software
When your business is working effectively, you'll find that emissions and energy use naturally drops as you maximise what you have available. Choosing a complete business software solution tailored to your industry needs can help you implement these changes to become more efficient.

As you've (hopefully!) seen throughout this guide, choosing software solutions can make a huge impact on how you do business and making things more efficient.

Wondering exactly how software can help make your business more energy efficient? Software can help with:

- **Stock control.** Reduce waste or materials ordered in error. Make the most of the stock you have and pick jobs according to material needs to save warehouse trips. Nesting software helps you make the most of end-of-roll and offcuts.
- **Delivery and installation.** Send the right order with all parts out to be fitted on location first time, reducing the need for revisits or shipping of replacements.
- **Customer communications.** No more unnecessary trips to site or meetings that can be resolved through an improved CRM database. Reduce paperwork and move contracts online for complete visibility.
- **Job tracking and workflow optimisation**. Ensure people are working to the best of their ability, improving productivity and getting jobs through production with minimal downtime.
- **Quoting and job orders.** Convrt quotes to job orders for total accuracy in production. No need for replacements or second production runs when you get things right first time.

Half the battle when it comes to being more energy efficient is finding new ways of doing the work. Rather than reaching for technology solutions that promise to save the world, you need to look critically at how your staff and production perform and what changes you can realistically make. Software, as a digital solution, is ideal as a first stage implementation tool when you're exploring ways to make your business more efficient.

Software fits in with what you already have and do day-to-day. It works in the background to find new ways of working by analysing patterns and algorithms, and it simplifies processes that are time consuming, energy heavy and low in overall value. It works with existing machinery and systems and is designed to help, not hinder, your working day.

Always start with the solutions that will be the easiest to implement, that deliver results quickly and show their return on investment. Choosing a software solution from Clarity delivers all this and more, with our range of features designed to help your business be the best version it can be.

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It's **simple** - it's Business Efficiency with **Clarity.**

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