

Supplier Profile

BY CATHIE BECK

Awards Shop Automation

NetSoft Studio

STATS

NetSoft Studio, Reno, NV

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Specialty: Software development for the award and silk-screen sign-shop industries.

Philosophy: Designing applications that save customers money. The software development is pretty straight-forward. It absolutely must save the customer more money than they spend on the software.

Five-year business goal: To have 500 companies in the industry utilizing the NetSoft Studio software solution.

What ARA has done for us: ARA gives us exposure to the industry, including (but not limited to) advertising opportunities. We get telephone calls from many people who say, "ARA recommended you to us." All of this presents great opportunities for us—and for our customers. It's a win-win for everyone.

Greatest success: Our greatest success comes from customer feedback. When a customer calls up 2 years after they've been using NetSoft Studio software, and they say, "Hey, I'm hooked," we know that the software is accomplishing what it's meant to do.



▲ NetSoft Studio owner M. David Matney at the 2008 ARA International Awards Market in Las Vegas.

NetSoft Studio software is the brainchild of M. David Matney, an IT and software development wizard who, a few years back, looked closely at some of the cumbersome, paper-heavy, and often disorganized management methods in awards and silk-screen industry shops and decided that there had to be a better way. "At the time, I was married to someone who owned and ran a trophy shop," he says, "and I was an IT person and had a lot of experience in designing software.

"When I looked closely at the way trophy and awards shops were typically run," he adds, "I saw zero automation. I saw absolutely no automation for the industry and I decided to develop something specifically designed for the headaches and problems that trophy and award shop business people face every day. Armed with that mission, that's exactly what we did—and then we decided to make it available to the industry."

Today NetSoft Studio provides software solutions to the award and

trophy industry, as well as the silk-screen shop industry. Their software solution manages all aspects of a shop's (or several shops') business lifecycles, including order management, and online and e-commerce management.

The Transition to Managing With Software

That's not to say that a shop's evolution into software-driven management is always easy or automatic in and of itself. Matney says that part of his job is to understand that many award and trophy shops are multi-generational and have been owned for a long time. To this end, he sees part of his purpose as that of an educator. "The industry is typically populated with mom-and-pop owners," he says. "And not a few come from non-technical backgrounds.

"So, it's a bit of an 'introduction' for some to consider that software can, first, be easy," he states, "and second, that it will—without a doubt—make their work lives so much easier.

"To use an analogy, if you're comfortable working on a typewriter and you've been doing that for a long time," he says, "there can be somewhat of a 'That's the way we've been doing it for so long' kind of philosophy. To teach someone that there is another way that will cut down on their workload—it can be a bit of a growth step to get them to make that jump."

However, seemingly every single NetSoft Studio customer ultimately becomes a software devotee and not a few of Matney's clients let him know that they wished they'd made the transition sooner. "Once they have the software in hand," he says, "they always say, 'Why did I wait so long?'"

As a practical matter, part of what can contribute to the getting-up-to-speed process is that it takes time to examine and understand a new method. "Getting those who don't use tech-

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nology to stop and take a look sometimes can just be a timing issue," says Matney. "There's the March industry trade show where a lot of people get introduced to us—and then those business owners go home to their busiest season. First, it's graduation, then it's baseball season and sometimes, though they've seen us at the trade shows and thoroughly appreciate what we do, they simply don't have time to look at it until maybe July. There's a timing thing."

Software that Facilitates Every Step

However, in working worlds where technology is encroaching ever further and faster into the day-to-day machinations of almost every business, Matney says that NetSoft Studio software grows more popular with each passing year. "When we're at the trade show, business hops," he says. "Every year we have to expand our booth and bring more people in to work it. The software is very popular because when people see it, they see how it

solves their day-to-day problems."

Specifically, NetSoft Studio software assists with nearly every step—and every person involved—in each and every transaction an award and trophy shop undertakes. "Everyone that works in a shop, from retail to wholesale, benefits in the use of the software," says Matney.

"Manufacturers, suppliers, shop owners, and all customers can and do benefit from the software's abilities.

"For example, people lose orders all the time in the trophy industry due to the amount of paperwork," he says. "They have to keep all the details of the engraving order on file and in file folders. One employee may file that order under the customer name, and another may file it under a company name. Or it may not get filed at all because they're simply too busy.

"One of the benefits the NetSoft Studio software provides," he comments, "is that it organizes data infor-

mation that trophy shops have to manage and puts it at everyone's fingertips on a computer. The order process, from start to completion, can go to any computer and identify what's been done on it, who's working on it, and where it's going next.

"It's amazing how the software cuts down or even eliminates a paper trail and the loss of information," he says. "There's no more contacting the customer to resend engraving specifications because they've been misplaced, which happens frequently. It also gives a customer the ability to communicate through the Internet. They can order products online, get questions answered, and place orders. It means just one trip for them to pick it up."

Greater Communication Accountability, and Success

Matney sees the trophy and award shop as a universe, as a manufac-

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turer, in its own right—with all of the processes and potential hiccups inherent in manufacturing. “A retail trophy shop is, in a manner of speaking, a manufacturer,” he says. “They buy components in order to create and produce trophies and awards. It doesn’t make any difference whether they’re working in acrylics or whatever, they are a producer.

“Inside that business,” he adds, “everyone from the order taker to the shipper, to the accounts receivable department—every person in the business now has access to every element of the process with the software. It’s designed as a transparent and accessible communication system. And that’s true for everyone from the customers to everyone involved internally.

Matney also adds that NetSoft Studio software manages the business, not just a business’ orders. “Time sheets, purchase sheets,” he says, “and other documentation necessary to a business can be determined by that business to be open to communication. It truly is a complete communication system.”

And Matney communicates the good news concerning NetSoft Studio software to his customers (and potential customers) in a number of ways, including the company’s solid repu-



▲ NetSoft’s BizWizard ShopKart—specifically designed and developed for the awards and recognition industry—helps retailers provide customers with an online product catalog.

tation in the industry. “We get business in any number of ways,” he says. “A lot of our customers come to us by word of mouth. But we also advertise in *Recognition Review* and

we attend trade shows.”

Which means that the company keeps a number of employees, beyond Matney, busy year-round, developing upgrades and enhancements to the NetSoft Studio software. “We have averaged about four releases a year over the past 4 years and 16 enhancements,” says Matney.

“One of the major things we’ve added is the ability to integrate with CorelDraw and Office programs,” he says. “Customers rave about it. They are happy because they used to have to manage those layouts themselves. Now when they pull up an order, they can click a button and instantly see the Corel layout.”

Though Matney is the brainchild behind the software’s design and implementation, he depends upon support staff to help with his company’s growth and with the product’s evolution. “We have four employees who do various aspects of the work,” he says. “Though I do all software development and customer support, I depend on some very good employees who support me—and that is critical.” ▲