

Who's driving?

Written by Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor
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Bob Baldwin, Editor During a recent visit by an ERP/EAM supplier to our office, the discussion turned to the types of information-rich reports that can be served up and the feature-rich screen interfaces to queries on the databases that are features of modern integrated systems. It was noted that company information networks can now link the plant floor to the executive suite. Of course, the dashboard metaphor was used to when referring to the screen display.

The mention of the term dashboard serves up from my memory banks a number of images, primarily the dashboard of an automobile, often the one on the TR3 Roadster I owned 50 years ago.

What does the super rich guy look for on the dashboard of his car? I can't say, but I tend to picture him looking more at the hand-finished walnut paneling than the instruments. Further, I envision him never sitting behind the wheel, but in the back seat reading the newspaper.

Although my TR3 didn't go all that fast, it was made to be driven. The dashboard layout was designed to serve up the most important information for the driver. The speedometer and tachometer were big and placed in front of the steering wheel for easy viewing. Gauges for fuel level, water temperature, oil pressure, and electrical charge were smaller and placed in the center console.

What about a dashboard for the auto mechanic? Today, it is a part of the diagnostic

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instrumentation that hooks up to the on-board computer. Drivers never see it because it only works when the car is in the shop. It's not all that different from some of the predictive maintenance software used in an industrial plant.

When you buy a car, you get the dashboard the design team decided was best for helping to sell the car. The same goes for the dashboard you see during the software demo. Fortunately, the dashboards on software packages are configurable.

The real trick is proper configuration of the dashboard. What performance indicators do you need? Can they be served up from the data you are able to collect? To continue with the automobile metaphor, you must decide where are you going and how fast you want to get there? What are you trying to do, win an off-road rally, qualify for the pole position at Indianapolis, or survive a demolition derby? How serious are you about winning? What kind of backing do you have? **MT**

