



# Increasing Productivity: A Winnable Challenge

To boost the productivity of your in-plant team, consider these seven factors.

*“The productivity of work is not the responsibility of the worker, but of the manager.” —Peter Drucker*

**C**ontinually increasing productivity is always important—even more so in the tough economic times we continue to live in. The good news is that almost every team has the potential to do this. Before sharing ideas on how to improve productivity, let’s first define it.

Productivity is a measure of how efficiently resources are being used. Productivity is simply a measure of outputs (goods/services produced) divided by inputs (resources used):

$$P = \frac{O \text{ (goods/services)}}{I \text{ (resources)}}$$

For example:

Assume last month that it took 1,000 labor hours to produce 200,000 pages of specialized documents. What is the productivity measurement?

$$P = \frac{200,000 \text{ mail pieces}}{1,000 \text{ labor hours}} = \frac{200 \text{ pages per}}{\text{labor hour}}$$

## How to Improve Productivity

There are two basic approaches to improving a productivity measurement:

1. Increase the volume of goods/services without increasing the amount of resources used.

2. Produce the same volume of good/services, but accomplish it with fewer resources.

Some of the factors that have a bearing on productivity include:

**1 TECHNOLOGY.** The wise use of automation and more sophisticated software can help us complete our work with fewer labor hours. Just this month I have been able to reduce (redeploy to another department) an FTE on one of my teams due to new software that is more efficient than the existing software.

**2 CAPITAL** (tools, equipment, etc). Having state-of-the-art equipment that fits your operations can open the door to significant reductions in manual effort and resources.

**3 METHODS.** Learning and applying best practices, and pursuing process improvements can drive improved efficiency and productivity. You can learn better

methods by attending conferences like MailCom and National Postal Forum, getting involved with professional organizations like the Mail Systems Management Association and Postal Customer Councils, and regularly reading trade journals like this one.

**4 QUALITY.** Improving the quality of work outputs can lead to better productivity. Why? It’s cheaper and more efficient to do the work correctly the first time and avoid re-work. John Wooden’s quote “Be quick, but don’t hurry” is applicable. Also, by instilling a quality mindset I have found the teams take more pride in their work and become more engaged and productive.

**5 MANAGEMENT.** Being a better servant leader and showing more care for your team members will pay dividends. Collaboratively developing a shared vision and challenging, yet achievable, goals will help inspire your team to higher levels of performance. Solicit ideas for improved productivity from your team members. They will feel respected, and

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*Wes Friesen is the manager of Billing, Credit & Special Attention Operations for Portland General Electric. He manages CIS Billing, Specialized Billing, Electronic Bills & Payments, Credit & Collections and OPUC & Special Attention Operations. Wes and the PGE print and mail team have earned many national awards, such as the IPMA Management Award, four NAPL Gold Awards and numerous PCC awards. Wes received the Franklin Award in 2010 for his contributions to the mail industry. For the past 27 years Wes has been a university instructor and a speaker at conferences. He has written numerous articles for trade journals. Wes earned a B.S. in Business Administration from George Fox University and an MBA from the University of Portland. He can be contacted at:*

**Wes.Friesen@pgn.com**

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## Steven Rigby: A Signature Career

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Management Awards that WSU has won during his tenure (in 2000, 2006 and 2009). He has spoken at several IPMA conferences (including the recent one in Kansas City) on issues such as sustainability and cross-media.

"Clear back in 2003, I spoke about Web and print together, and people thought I was Looney Tunes," he acknowledges. Now that the entire industry has its collective eye on cross-media, Rigby can enjoy the last laugh.

"It's exciting to see print and Web come together, and we do cross-media very well here at WSU," he asserts proudly.

Looking back, Rigby sees a well-chosen and happily traveled career path. "If I could change something, I probably would have joined the education system sooner," he considers. "I've enjoyed being part of a university a lot."

Really, though, Rigby has been an educator extraordinaire since high school. At WSU, he continues to reach out and teach. "Since we put in our first digital press in 2005, I've spent a lot of time educating people on campus about digital printing," he relates.

"I just really took to and have always enjoyed printing," Rigby concludes. "The challenge and excitement of rapidly advancing technology—that's what keeps me going. You can't let up for a minute or you'll miss something." **IPG**

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you will glean some great ideas along the way.

**6 MOTIVATION** of workers. Providing positive recognition and showing more care for your employees will lead to a higher morale, higher motivation and higher productivity. I agree with Tom Peters who said "The simple act of paying positive attention to people has a great deal to do with productivity." Remember to measure productivity and celebrate improvements along the way. Celebrating progress builds a sense of achievement and a desire to keep getting better.

**7 SKILLS/EXPERTISE OF TEAM MEMBERS.** The ongoing training and development of your team members is key to enhancing productivity. A few ideas include holding team meetings for training, cross-training your staff, participating in trade associations, sending people to conferences/seminars, university courses, mentoring—the list goes on.

Let me share a final tip to improve the productivity of your team. Paul Gauguin wisely said "Stressing output is the key to improving productivity, while looking to increase activity can result in just the opposite." Focusing on effectively and efficiently producing output, while minimizing resources used, will result in increased productivity. **IPG**