



# Spinning Wirelessly at Franjo Metal Spinning\*

## Solution Summary

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Franjo Metal Spinning has been fabricating metal parts for clients for more than 26 years. Significant company growth, coupled with expansion into new market niches pushed the company to upgrade from old computers using DOS\* technology to a new wireless network and modern business management tools. The results were improved customer service, better internal inventory management and enhanced machinery maintenance.

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## Challenge

For more than 26 years, Franjo Metal Spinning, located in Montréal, has been fabricating metal components for a range of industry sectors including lighting, automotive, marine, heating & ventilation and stainless steel cookware for companies across Canada and the United States. With both specialized metal spinning machines, using CNC\* (computer numerical control) technology, and hand spinning techniques, the company fabricates parts that are critical components of their clients' supply chain.

With ancient computers and a paper-based inventory control system, Franjo Metal Spinning had difficulty maintaining up to date inventory records, and their computers were unable to handle modern engineering programs like AutoCAD\*.

"Our inventory was managed by one person using a pen and paper. It was getting to be a daunting task to keep on top of our materials and keep an accurate count," says Ryan Henderson, Information Technology Specialist for Franjo Metal Spinning, noting materials are used up daily and need to be quickly replenished to keep their machines and employees working. Since some of their raw materials take six months to ship, running out would cause manufacturing to grind to a halt.

"If we are not on top of what we have in stock, we're finished. Running out of raw materials can mean missing a deadline and losing a client."

The company expanded its operations into the specialized market of stainless steel metal spinning, and was constantly adding specialized fabrication techniques. With the growth of the business, coupled with the expansion into new metal spinning fabrication, Franjo knew it needed a more modern IT infrastructure to better track its supply chain, and communicate with its clients.

The first things to go were the old computers. "They were dinosaurs," says Henderson. "We could no longer get support for some of our old programs."

## Solution

A critical first step was upgrading the office equipment from DOS machines to new Dell™ Optiplex SX280 with Intel® Pentium® 4 Processor technology, and a business management suite to improve accounting and payroll functions and to better track inventory.

“Everything runs much smoother and better than before,” says Henderson, adding when it came time to making the decision about what to buy, he knew the office machines needed Intel Pentium 4 technology. “I’ve been using Intel products since I bought my first computer 12 years ago. Intel is worry free and reliable. There was no question our company computers would use Intel technology.”

Next, Henderson needed to improve communications from the manufacturing floor, back-room inventory and the front office staff. Increased communication translates into more efficiency, less running back and forth between building areas, and better use of staff time. Henderson knew that implementing a wireless LAN would allow the company to expand its use of technology both on the manufacturing floor, as well as in critical administrative areas including inventory controls. Wiring a 26,000 square foot facility was not a feasible option. Wireless was the only solution, and Henderson knew that a notebook with Intel® Centrino™ mobile technology would afford Franjo the reliability, ease of use and extended battery life he needed.

“I am addicted to wireless. Wireless affords me mobility that can’t be compared. I get important sales information instantly. It’s amazing,” says Henderson, who in addition to his role in IT is responsible for some areas of sales and business development. The internet is a critical business development tool for Franjo. With a strong web presence, Franjo is able to attract and support clients around the world.

### **Wireless Inventory:**

At any given time, Franjo has more than 500,000 pounds of raw metal stored in its warehouse. This inventory of raw materials is essential for everything the company produces. Before the conversion to a wireless LAN, the floor manager would walk around the back warehouse with a pen and paper to log what materials had come in and what was being used.

**“Before we had a lot of human errors. Now that it’s computerized, there are fewer errors and everyone has access to an up to date inventory list.”**

**– Martin Guschlbauer, Director of Operations,  
Franjo Metal Spinning**

With a centralized database of the inventory and real-time tracking over the wireless network, everyone can see what materials are on hand, what needs to be ordered, and what has arrived. Ryan says that since some of their raw materials can take six months to arrive after the order is placed, the new electronic database ensures they never run out of product.

“I walk around the warehouse when new skids arrive and punch in the new materials into my Centrino notebook,” says Ryan, noting the time to update inventory now takes 10 minutes a week, compared to 6-8 hours under the old system. “We now have a completely up to date and accurate count of what we have, and what we need.”

“Some of our jobs require a constant flow of raw materials. We need to have it on hand to meet our clients’ contracts. If we miss a deadline, their supply chain is affected, and we could lose the contract, and the client.”

### **Wireless Saves Programming Time:**

Cornerstones of Franjo’s operations are its CNC metal spinning machines. These machines run constantly turning raw metal discs into specific client component parts. For every new part being manufactured, a programmer needs to set up the machine to accurately reproduce the required part. The programmer creates a computer program, which is uploaded into the CNC machine. In the past, the programmer would spend time and energy printing paper copies of the part, and physically running between the machine and a computer in the front office to program the manufacturing process. With the new wireless LAN, the programmer can carry the Intel Centrino mobile technology-based laptop right to the machine, write the fabrication program, upload it to the CNC machine and instantly verify the program is accurately manufacturing the part needed.

“He has instant access to technical data that he needs to do his job faster, and significantly reduces the amount of raw materials scrapped during test runs of a new program,” says Ryan, adding that production speed has increased about

14 per cent thanks to wireless technology and their laptop running Intel Centrino Mobile Technology.

Ryan adds that the faster a program can be written and loaded onto the production machine, the faster a job can get started. Eliminating the time required for the programmer to run between the office and the CNC machine by connecting wirelessly to the internal databases and drawing libraries saves time, and reduces internal costs.

#### **Technology Enabled Maintenance:**

Since the CNC machines weigh thousands of pounds, are manufactured in Germany and are stationary on the manufacturing floor, breakdowns present a significant challenge for the company. If the machine can't be repaired quickly, international calls to Germany are needed to get the machines up and running.

"If a machine is down, it costs time, money and potentially a client. These machines are in constant activity and produce millions of pieces," says Guschlbauer. "Wireless allows us to connect the machine instantly to the network and interface with maintenance people in Germany. They can get right into our machine, move parts and fix any problems. It's a huge improvement and saves us both time and long distance charges."

#### **Newer Technology Equals Enhanced Service:**

An added benefit of new computers and wireless access has been Franjo's ability to view, edit and more effectively use client CAD drawings. In the past, clients would mail hard copy technical drawings for any new project. This could delay starting a project by four or five days. With those paper drawings on the shop floor, they quickly got covered in dirt and oil requiring many copies to be remade.

Today, the technical drawings can be emailed and Franjo has the computing power to work with the files. They can also compare the technical specs to the drawings in the company's databases and recommend changes that could improve the end product.

In addition, Franjo can now custom design pieces for clients who arrive without engineered drawings. Henderson can now translate pen and paper ideas to AutoCAD\* drawings, which further expands the value of the service they are providing to clients.

## **Future Uses**

Ryan says they are just starting to see the power of wireless for their operations and plan to continue enhancing how they are using technology to improve manufacturing efficiency, save time and money, as well as enhance service to clients.

We went from dinosaur machines and slow internet connection to what we have now. We are right in the middle of expanding our use of technology. The possibilities for wireless are endless. We don't even know where it's going to take us yet."

Already expanding AutoCAD services for clients, Ryan sees further enhancements to the wireless LAN to incorporate new office space being constructed above the manufacturing floor, as well as further expanding use of technology for sales and marketing.

"There is still a lot more we can do with wireless. This is the tip of the iceberg," says Guschlbauer, noting the changes to date have saved Franjo tens of thousands of dollars. "You will see us adapting more and more to the technology. The more we can adapt, the better it is for us and our clients."

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