

# Adopting new technology starts with asking the right questions



**Batesville Tool & Die**  
*Batesville, Ind.*

For the team at Batesville Tool & Die, the big question isn't, "Should we automate?" but, rather, "What should we automate next?"

"I tell people we're spending as much money as we can possibly spend on automation, because it's got the best return," says Batesville Tool & Die President Bob Holtel.

A contract manufacturer that does much of its business with the automotive industry, Batesville Tool & Die succeeds by offering high-volume, high-speed work with the fewest flaws possible, a value proposition that's always ripe for automation, Holtel says. Successfully deciding how and when to deploy automation relies on posing the right questions, he suggests.

Following are some that the Batesville Tool & Die recommend asking:

- **What do we do a lot of today and what will we benefit from for the next 5-7 years?** High-volume processes that require precise and repetitive steps are obvious candidates for automation. Where in your operation can you do a better job and make an impact on the product? Start the tech-adoption journey by asking where such tasks exist in your operation.
- **What's the goal? Are we looking for efficiency, speed, improved quality, safety or all of the above?** Once you identify the opportunity, start exploring different options for automation. Don't buy technology for technology's sake or let a vendor push you into something that won't deliver a return. Instead, Holtel says, talk to your people, assess your goals and always ask, "What are we trying to accomplish?"

- **Who are the best team members and who is the best facilitator to lead the project?** Pull together a diverse team/assign a project leader. This could seem like an unexpected priority for tech adoption, but Holtel believes it is an essential question. "Have somebody that's a good communicator leading the team so you can extract as much information as possible out the group of people who are actually going to use the machine," he says.
- **Can you show me?** Vendors have plenty of good technology to sell you. Your job is to make sure they're offering something that will do what you need it to do. Holtel says businesses should challenge vendors to "show me you've done something similar before and take me to your customer that has used your technology."

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**Bob Holtel**

*President,  
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- **What would the solution look like?** Challenge the team to create a vision of your solution. "Ask them, 'OK, what's it look like physically and technology-wise?'" Holtel says. "Then you come up with a proposal, and you start putting it all together."
- **Test your concept...Will it work?** For its automation efforts, Batesville Tool & Die sets up a small-scale testing space that allows team members to see how machines integrate, what's possible and where the kinks might be. Still, Holtel says, change will always come with some risk. "You've got to take a leap of faith at some point," he says. "You've got to say, 'OK. We're going to go for it.'"
- **What are our metrics?** Holtel still has notes he wrote when his team started planning one automation project, including metrics scribbled to measure impact. Now he can rattle off numbers and conclude, "It met expectations."
- **What's next?** Constantly look for the next opportunity, Holtel says. "Automation leads to other automation, right?" he says. "You build confidence when you do something right and improve what you didn't like on the last machine".



#### **About Batesville Tool & Die**

Batesville Tool & Die, Inc., headquartered in Batesville, Indiana since 1978, is a leader in precision metal stamping and innovative manufacturing solutions. With a global presence and decades of expertise, BTD is dedicated to delivering exceptional quality and driving innovation in the manufacturing industry and operates state-of-the-art facilities with other 75 presses ranging from 50 to 1,200 tons. To learn more, visit <https://www.btdinc.com/>