

Cleaning Out the Garage



What does your garage look like? I'm embarrassed to tell you that mine isn't what it should be. OK, it may not qualify for a TV reality show and it's NOT the one pictured above. However, considering that I've worked for a very long time for a company that makes storage products, I'm not terribly proud of it. You see, like many engineers, I'm something of a pack rat. Some things have sentimental value. Some were expensive or hard to come by and, even though I no longer need them, I can't bring myself to toss them. Others I MAY need somewhere down the road...

As long as I have space to store this stuff, what's the harm?

But is hanging on to all that junk really harmless? The problem, of course, is that the junk that seems so harmless as long as I have the space to store it is really costing me both time and money. Could I sell some of that stuff and put the money to better use? If I got rid of it, could I put the space to better use? If I got rid of the stuff I don't need, could I more quickly find the stuff I do need?

It occurs to me that many companies have product lines that resemble my garage. If yours is among them, it may be time to consider some serious product line house cleaning. If you are to maintain acceptable delivery times and inventory turns while you introduce new products, you MUST have the discipline to kill the products that are no longer as important to you as they once were. That might mean killing the very product that put you in business but, hey, Ford no longer sells the Model A, do they? It might even mean killing a product that still brings in a fair bit of money, but if you can replace it with a product that brings in even more money, is that so bad?

Products that are past their prime tie up inventory dollars that could be used to support new products. They tie up production resources, thereby lengthening lead times. They even distract your sales force who should be focusing on products of the future, not hanging on to those of the past.

Paradoxically, your new product process has to include an old product process. It takes courage to do it but, just as proper pruning gives vitality to a tree or shrub, a carefully developed and executed product pruning process is vital to your overall product lifecycle management process. It's not nearly as exciting as developing new products but it's every bit as important.

About J. H. Welsch Consulting, L.L.C.

Jack Welsch has had over 4 decades of experience in engineering and new product development at all levels and has been awarded over 35 U.S. patents. He has been directly involved with the phased and gated development process since 1979 and has spent much of his time and energy in the continuous improvement of the process. While most of his career has been spent in manufacturing companies, he has taught the business aspects of product development as an adjunct instructor, at both Lehigh and Wilkes Universities. In addition to his roles as Principal of J. H. Welsch Consulting, L.L.C., he is Chairman of Wilkes' Industrial Advisory Board.

J. H. Welsch Consulting, L.L.C. is dedicated to helping firms improve their new product development process. Learn more at www.jhwelsch.com/npd.