



Controls what's logical?

"MR. SULU - GIVE ME WARP 3, PUT UP THE FORCE FIELDS AND APPLY THE CLEAR!"

by Jim MacDonald

illustration by John Crossen

I realize a downdraft booth is NOT the Starship Enterprise, but one of the biggest changes I have seen in paint spray booth technology goes back to 'user friendly,' but much more encompassing control panels.

Is it just me, or do any of you remember spray booths that had an 'ON/OFF' switch on the side, and a light switch beside it? You would come in, toggle the booth on, and then toggle the lights and you were good to go!

Today, you see everything from simple toggle switches to control panels with LCD touch screens.

We literally have computers hung on the side of spray booths, recording service issues, automatically balancing, triggering and recording temperatures, etc. The panel will give you a read out of any and all operating issues over a set time.

Technicians who know how the panel operates can go in and see if 'issues' had occurred in the past, to better help them diagnose present problems. Owners and painters will be reminded when filters need to be changed and regular service is due. Again, not the Starship Enterprise, but certainly the same as my Ford Escape System Check 'CHANGE

OIL NOW' display that comes up on my dash.

Today's panels can even be connected to modems that will allow a technician to trouble shoot the unit over the phone or PC! Optimum paint application conditions are maintained by pre-set parameters determined by operator or paint supplier.

PLC's allow input and exhaust Variable Frequency Drives to talk to each other, speeding up or slowing down depending on filter loading. This translates into savings for the owner, as amp draws are minimized and the efficient use of electricity is ensured.

5" or 10" LCD screens clearly show us in-booth conditions (i.e. temperatures, air flow, amp draws, intake ON/OFF, exhaust ON/OFF). These colourful displays are very high-tech looking and cannot help but give a high-tech look to the booth, and more importantly, the shop using it.

People who install these units have been trained and are happy that all these controls are so 'user friendly.' The paint companies love having them in their training centres so they can maintain reliable consistency. The shop owners like the fact that they, or their employees can easily check conditions, and that they are receiving visual cues to keep service up!

All of this stuff is great, however, what do the painters think? They are the people who have to use it, and in all fairness, they have had an awful lot to digest over the last few months.

The analogy I will draw was the introduction of the 'downdraft booth' back in the 70's, and then its true growth in the 80's. These old systems were pretty simple, however, they were foreign environments to the older painters. With that said, some really embraced it and loved working in a much more dust free, painter-friendly environment. In the other corner were painters who were intimidated by this new 'high-tech' equipment and worked with it, reluctantly, blaming all paint problems on the paint supplier, the gun supplier or the booth supplier.

The industry moved on, and today's painters have all worked in downdraft booths and downdraft has become the norm. We look sideways at anyone who is not using a pressurized or downdraft type system. The onset of waterborne has made this decision even more prevalent for the few who are still using unpressurized systems.

So are the painters comfortable with PC style menu screens? Do the painters want all the buttons and screens? Do painters want all the available options these new PLC control panels offer, or are they scared of them?

Our experience has been that these panels are great, however, they are intimidating, not just to us, but also to a skilled technician, like a painter who is running at the speed of sound to keep up with all the recent material and equipment changes that will be mandated to some point within the next year or so.


With the above in mind, we would suggest that manufacturers, sellers, and paint suppliers (all the people who embrace these improvements), do NOT forget the end user – THE PAINTER. We would suggest that trouble shooting charts, detailed training (along the same lines what the paint companies have given for the new materials!), training videos and 1-800 support lines all be given some consideration. All of these improvements and additions to the good old 'ON/OFF,' 'Paint/Bake' are wonderful, however, we sometimes overdo it and scare the very person who has to make it work. If the painters are not comfortable, then the booth, the gun and materials will never work properly.

Like with everything else, education is a great way to deal with 'improvements.' So let's not forget about the painter, and let's make sure he/she not only embraces these improved systems, but also understands them. Understanding will make life much simpler for all, and the paint companies have given us a very good example of that with the clinics and training that they offer to ensure the waterborne product is embraced.

We would encourage all to promote these new opportunities, but do it in a proper manner. We are lobbying the equipment suppliers to follow the paint company leads and not only continue to improve these high-tech panels, but also make 'user friendly aids' to take the heat off the poor old painter!

Our industry continues to develop, and that can never be discouraged, however, if it is NOT properly promoted and deployed it can create a lot of problems that will be difficult to change 'after the fact.'

We would love to hear your comments on what you have, and like, or what you would like to see on your 'perfect' control panel! Let CQ know, or e-mail us direct at ontariospraybooth@bellnet.ca and later on we would be happy to share your thoughts!

Good Finishing! 

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