

DM2 Best Practices Meetings Bring Clients Together To Share Experiences In Implementing Software Solutions

By Tom Lane, DM2 Software

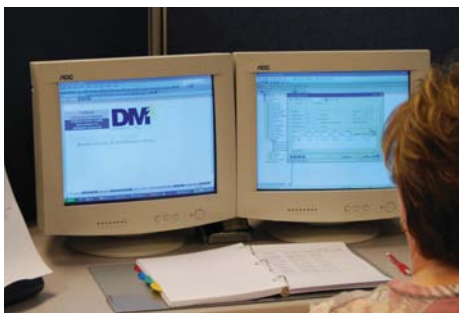
The definition of the word “cliché” is not flattering: “a phrase or opinion that is overused and betrays a lack of original thought.” But the thing about clichés is, they would have never reached their level of overuse if there weren’t more than a grain of truth to them.

Take, for instance, “practice makes perfect.” From the child learning to spell to the basketball player shooting free throws to the ballet dancer polishing her steps, they’ve all been taught that “practice makes perfect,” i.e. the more you practice at doing something, the better you will become at it.

The same thinking holds true in the business world, as well. In order to offer the best products and services to a customer base, companies need to continuously hone and refine their approach to doing business. And with the way that the never-ending stream of technological advances bombards them, this continuing education needs to take place on an almost daily basis.

As a business committed to growth, DeKalb Petroleum, Duluth, GA, a wholesale supplier of petroleum products for more than 20 years to independent dealers in the Southeast, found itself in the position of having to reassess the efficiency of its current accounting software.

“As the business grew we got to the point where our IT people told us we would have to switch to larger accounting software,” explained Joe Nardi, CFO of DeKalb Petroleum. “We looked around at the petroleum-software companies that were out there



DeKalb Petroleum gets the most out of its DM2 software by attending DM2’s Best Practices Meetings each year.

and we thought DM2 was the best one for our operation. We are very happy with what they’ve been able to provide us.”



Best Practices Meetings are open to any company using DM2 products. Attendees (pictured) from the most recent Best Practices Meeting in June 2008 listen to one of DM2’s ABS (Advanced Business Solutions) consulting group members during the event.

What Vancouver, WA-based DM2 Software provides is a software solution based on Sage MAS 90 and Sage MAS 200 accounting-software platforms. Thanks to Sage, MAS 90 and 200 are rich in accounting, financial reporting, distribution, manufacturing and e-business management solutions. This enables DM2 to focus on developing applications specifically for petroleum marketing applications, such as fuel delivery, lubricant blending and re-packaging as well as for c-stores, cardlocks, home heating, propane and wet-hosing/mobile fueling operations.

DeKalb Petroleum signed up with DM2 in 2003 and since then has watched its business grow to 2 million gallons of fuel a month that is supplied to independent CITGO dealers. In addition, DeKalb has supply agreements and does contract work and invoice processing for three other jobbers in the region. Those jobbers supply a mix of Exxon, Texaco, Chevron, Shell and CITGO retail sites in what will soon be seven Southeastern states. In total, DeKalb Petroleum now has a hand in the supply of almost 300 retail locations and wholesales nearly 15 million gallons of petroleum products a month.

Not only does DM2’s software offer the capacity that DeKalb needs to stay up-to-date with its expanding customer base, but it provides the compatibility and ability to interface with the pricing and supply data that DeKalb is getting on a daily basis from DTN, Omaha, NE.

“Anytime you’re dealing with software, there are small bumps in the road, but DM2’s

been great,” Nardi continued. “They help us maintain low overhead and continue to grow without having to add additional personnel, which is key since margins are so tight that anytime you can cut down on expenses it benefits the company.”

The Best Intentions

These days, however, just buying and installing a software solution is hardly enough. With the rapid changes and advances in technology, as well as how the supply segment of the petroleum industry has evolved over the past decade, software providers need to do more for their customers.

With that in mind, DM2, which has been developing software designed to help diversified petroleum marketers and jobbers increase market share and improve profitability through automation since 1989, has instituted a series of meetings designed to bring small groups of peer customers together to discuss the latest industry trends, as well as ways to make the most of DM2’s products while battling the challenges that will inevitably arise.

DM2 calls these gatherings Best Practices Meetings and they are held on a regular basis in regional locations, oftentimes in conjunction with a larger national event, like the NACS Show. Best Practices Meetings are open to any company using DM2 products and that are also enrolled in DM2’s Unlimited Assistance subscription plan. The only cost to the attendee is the cost of travel to and

lodging at the meeting site. A Best Practices Meeting is a one-day long informal gathering of representatives from no more than 12 companies with each company limited to no more than two attendees. The focus of the gathering is to share experiences and practices on the implementation of DM2 products in their business and to brainstorm solutions to problems that they are encountering. These meetings are facilitated by the Vice President of DM2's ABS (Advanced Business Solutions) consulting group. ABS consultants begin where DM2 installation consultants leave off. They offer advanced business consulting services that go beyond just implementing software. They focus on helping DM2 customers improve their business by streamlining processes and leveraging the automation solutions DM2 has developed through 20 years of experience working with marketers. DM2's Vice President's of Development, Support and Professional Services are also on hand to serve as observers and problem-solvers during the meeting, but not as drivers of the conversation. (DM2 also hosts an annual three-day user's gathering called the Connections Conference at its Vancouver headquarters, but that consists of prepared topics targeted to an audience of clients numbering in the hundreds. While it provides a worthy opportunity to network with peers and learn the latest about DM2 products and practices, it does not offer the intimate, ad-hoc setting of a Best Practices Meeting.)



DeKalb Petroleum began using DM2 software at its Duluth, GA, headquarters in 2003. Since then, the company has watched its business grow to 2 million gallons of fuel a month that is supplied to independent CITGO dealers.

Since the attendees at a Best Practices Meeting drive the agenda in a less-structured setting than the Connections Conference, the amount of time and focus given to a particular subject is at the discretion of the group, with the discussion specific to the experience of the participants. While the idea is for companies to compare notes on how they are using DM2's software, attendees will also often learn about unique features of the software that they weren't aware of or they will gain new insight into how to best use certain features. With this in mind, DM2 recommends that companies send a representative who has a deep understanding of the business's operations, performance and how DM2's products fit into the configuration of the company's IT infrastructure, as well as the authority to adopt any new practices that may be gleaned from the meeting.

This intimacy, along with the high level of corporate involvement, results in an open exchange of ideas and concepts that has paid off for DeKalb Petroleum as the company has taken several scenarios that have come up during the course of a meeting and used them to improve its own operations.

"We've been pretty good at implementing what we have to become more efficient, and it's always good to hear problems and issues other companies are having so you can help them out and they can help you out," Nardi explained. "For us, anytime we can interact with other companies and key people at DM2, we want to take advantage of that. There are always a few issues that come up that you want to bring to them and being able to do that face-to-face is key. DM2 does a good job of putting the onus on the company to tell them what their biggest challenges are going forward and what they're going to do to meet those challenges."

The information gathered at a Best Practices Meeting is not only helpful in the battle with current business conditions, but it can also be useful when considering the

future. As DeKalb Petroleum continues to grow its customer base in the Southeast the meetings provide background from other companies that have successfully expanded their operations.

"We're a lot more streamlined than a lot of other companies, but we're looking to grow and a lot of time that growth includes parts of the industry we aren't familiar with," Nardi said. "Hearing other points of view can help us, and then we can look at how we can utilize DM2 to grow in those areas where we might be less proficient."

And, no matter the direction the growth of DeKalb Petroleum takes the company, Nardi is confident that DM2 will be there every step of the way.

"The best thing about DM2 is that they are very responsive," he said. "In dealing with other companies you can tell the person who handles your account what the problem is and a lot of times things don't get done. With DM2, if we tell them something is wrong, they fix it before the next upgrade. They are very responsive to each individual customer."

So, in the ongoing need to keep a business on the cutting edge, examining all avenues to improvement is extremely important. By taking stock of the benefits that DM2's Best Practices Meetings can offer, DM2 customers are practicing a perfect way to garner business success.



For more information on DM2 Software's Best Practices Meetings, or other products from DM2 Software, Inc., Vancouver, WA, please contact Tom Lane, Vice President of Sales, at TomL@dm2.com or (630) 257-1027. You can also visit www.dm2.com for more information.



DeKalb Petroleum now has a hand in the supply of almost 300 retail locations and wholesales nearly 15 million gallons of petroleum products a month.

To ensure that DeKalb Petroleum continues to get the most out of its DM2 software, Nardi has attended two Best Practices Meetings, the last one in November 2007, which had half-a-dozen attendees and was held in Atlanta at the same time as The NACS Show.

"We go to the user's conference every year and we get a lot of new, valuable information, but Best Practices Meetings are much more intimate and allow for much more open discussion than the user's conference does since it's about what issues we have, what we'd like to see and how DM2 can help us," said Nardi.