Sharp Tool

■ Logger's Edge software is designed for logging businesses.

Most any logger or timber dealer will agree that reviewing paperwork is about the last thing in the world he wants to do. In fact, many loggers steer as far clear from the office as they possibly can.

Yet more and more loggers are realizing that smart and effective use of a computer in their office is as critical as smart and effective use of equipment on a logging site. The reality of today's unforgiving business environment is that being good at cutting trees doesn't necessarily cut it anymore. Timbermen must be good at

business as well! Suppliers who can monitor production and costs on a timely, accurate basis are the ones who will likely be in business five years from now.

Many timber/logging companies are still trying to manage their operations by using rudimentary spreadsheet systems—even #2 lead pencils and manual ledgers—to track job production and profits. Not only are such systems prone to human error, they also do not provide efficient and timely reports on tract production and profits. Current, accurate information is critical in

preparing bids on timber sales or negotiating contracts or service fees.

Caribou Software specializes in providing logging contractors and timber dealers specialized software designed to help them run more efficient and profitable businesses. The easy-to-use system enables users to keep track of load tickets, compare actual deliveries to cruise information on a species and product basis, automate the contractor-landowner payment process, streamline the mill reconciliation process, and calculate production and profit on a job-by-job basis. In addition, it enables
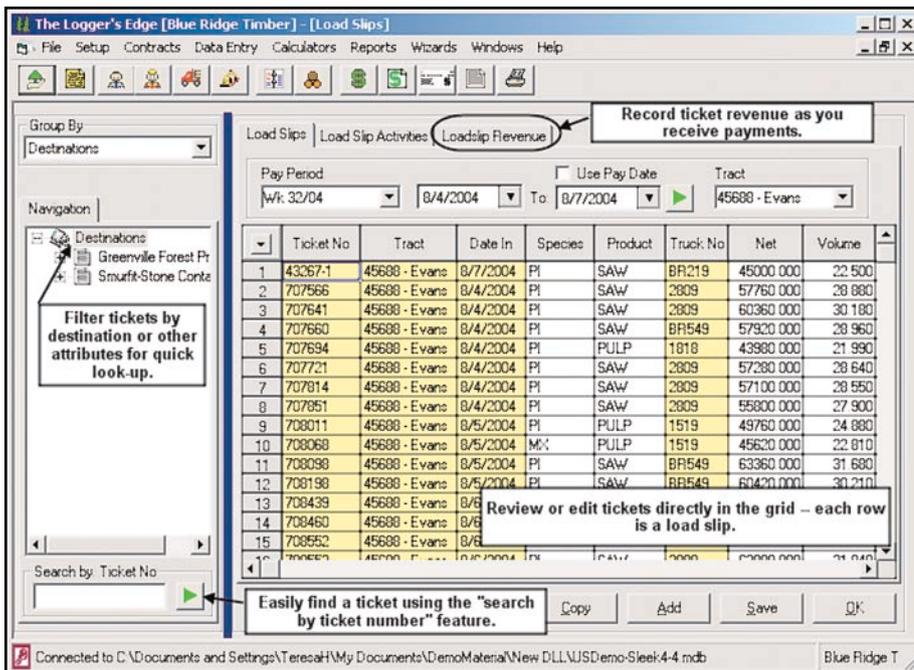
Logger's Edge software simplifies labor-intensive tasks such as preparing tax filings.

Blue Ridge Timber

Longstreet Logging
Highway 211 East #2205
Luray, Va
22835

4598 Clear Creek Road
Roanoke, VA
24987

Pay Period: Wk 36/04
Start Date: 08/30/2004
End Date: 09/05/2004

Date	Ticket #	Tract	Destination	Species	Product	Rate	Units		Pay Amount
Cutting									
08/30/2004	358170	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	27.77	TON	583.07
08/30/2004	358100	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	27.84	TON	584.54
08/30/2004	358630	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	25.65	TON	538.55
08/30/2004	359070	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	26.21	TON	550.31
08/30/2004	358070	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	27.87	TON	585.17
08/30/2004	358680	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	28.07	TON	589.37
08/30/2004	358000	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	26.68	TON	560.18
08/30/2004	358180	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	26.30	TON	552.30
08/31/2004	359640	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	27.50	TON	577.40
08/31/2004	359610	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	27.58	TON	579.18
08/31/2004	360190	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	26.36	TON	553.56
08/31/2004	359570	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	27.47	TON	576.77
08/31/2004	360200	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	28.27	TON	593.57
08/31/2004	359510	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	26.87	TON	564.17
08/31/2004	360130	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	26.26	TON	551.36
09/01/2004	359750	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	25.71	TON	539.91
09/01/2004	361790	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	25.90	TON	543.90
09/01/2004	361520	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	26.58	TON	558.08
09/01/2004	361630	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	26.56	TON	557.66
09/02/2004	363020	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	26.44	TON	555.24
09/02/2004	363120	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	25.15	TON	528.05
09/02/2004	363730	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	24.69	TON	518.49
09/03/2004	364540	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	24.18	TON	507.78
09/03/2004	364630	15010 - McFar	Davenport	MX	POLE	21.00	25.01	TON	525.21
15010 - McFar			(Load Count: 24)				636.85		13,373.75

Logger's Edge helps track loads by several variables.

loggers to keep track of equipment repair and fuel costs and monitor labor and equipment use on each job.

Judging by feedback from Caribou's customers, their focus on increasing efficiency and providing critical business information is paying off. In fact, after adopting Caribou's system, one logging company in Virginia was able to eliminate the costs of an outside bookkeeping firm by taking the employee and contractor payment process in-house. Prior to purchasing Caribou's

Logger's Edge (LE) software two years ago, this logger didn't even own a computer, but he knew that he couldn't continue to run his business without being able to see, job by job, whether he was making money. Today he insists that he couldn't do without Logger's Edge. In addition to the bookkeeping costs he eliminated, he says he is also making better purchasing decisions on timber tracts.

Walt Dasher, principal of Dasher Industries, Glennville Ga., is satisfied

as well. He was already using computers, managing load tickets through a basic spreadsheet system, but the process involved lots of manual work and was too prone to human error. "I just knew there had to be a more efficient way of tracking our load ticket information," Dasher says. "I also knew that whatever solution I found had to be easy to use."

He says LE is perfect for his business. Errors are down and he has realized other benefits. For example, he can now efficiently generate professional-looking settlement sheets for all his truckers, itemizing details of each load ticket and the pay amount. "Load-by-load, mile-by-mile, ticket-by-ticket, the data are all there. Because they can see their performance week-to-week, I spend much less time answering questions on payday. Plus, I can generate my trucker settlements in about half the time it used to take."

Dasher says using a system like LE is simply a smart business decision. "I used to review my numbers only every two weeks. Now, I review them every two or three days. If a crew's tons are down, I see it right away and can investigate it immediately."

Caribou focuses on helping users improve their overall efficiency and become more accountable. According to Caribou, here's how LE helps users achieve these objectives:

● Reduces time spent on mundane tasks such as generating contractor and landowner statements, reconciling payment from mills, preparing IFTA fuel tax filings and complying with state timber tax reporting requirements.

● Allows owners and managers to monitor production, revenue, and costs for each tract on a weekly or daily basis and to proactively address problems in the field as they arise.

● Allows weekly monitoring of timber tracts purchased on a lump sum basis—how much timber remains to be harvested, whether the tract actually made money upon completion of harvest based on its under- or over-cut; and allows businesses to be proactive in managing equipment costs and utilization.

Loggers have millions of dollars invested in equipment, yet surprisingly few have the tracking tools needed

to maintain the equipment effectively, to track maintenance costs and to identify utilization problems with specific machines.

Program Evolution

Caribou Software's owners, Bob Lucke and Teresa Hannah, met nearly 20 years ago while working at a large accounting firm in Washington, DC, developing and supporting tax software for multinational corporations. Six years ago, they escaped the hectic city life and moved to Hinton, Alberta. They founded Caribou Software and took over the rights to a software product that was popular among logging contractors in Western Canada in the 1990s. That program, known as The Log Harvester, was originally built as a DOS-based system. They completely revised and rebuilt the program, using Microsoft standard tools, and called it Logger's Edge.

Although the original DOS-based program was built specifically for Canadian use, the current program has been substantially enhanced to accommodate a wide range of business practices throughout North America. Within the last year alone, Caribou has expanded its customer base to include clients located as far away as Florida, Maine, and Washington. The system has been built with enough flexibility that it can easily handle the variety of business rules required from such a diverse client base.

Within the last 30 months, Caribou has more than quadrupled its customer base from roughly 25 clients to over 100. It currently has five employees to sell and support the products. According to Hannah, "While five may not sound like many in light of the customer base, we have found that our users become self-sufficient pretty quickly after receiving training on the system. We have also been expanding the training and documentation materials that we offer on our web site, which has helped leverage our people over a large number of customers."

Asked about the keys to Caribou's success, Hannah identifies four.

"First, we have a product that fills a real need in a niche market. There is a large, under-served demand among logging companies and small sawmills for a system to streamline complex business practices such as conversion calculations, overload tracking, and fuel rebate reporting that have historically been performed manually," she relates. "The increasingly intense competitive environment has driven many companies to seek tools to help reduce costs."

A second factor is their use of the internet. "We make aggressive use of the latest internet technology to allow us to provide effective and efficient remote support. The majority of our training and support is delivered remotely at the click of a mouse."

The third is that they love what they do, and love working with the caliber of people they encounter in the logging business. "Logging contractors and timber dealers are some of the hardest-working, down-to-earth, honest people you can find. It's rewarding to serve people who are so dedicated to the success of their businesses."

The fourth key is Caribou person-

nel. "We have a dedicated team that understands that having a strong software product is only part of the equation to success. The other part is providing reliable, friendly, and efficient training and support to ensure that our customers reap the value of their investment with us. Software companies have a reputation for selling their product and then leaving users to figure things out on their own. We pride ourselves on developing strong relationships with each of our customers and we tailor our level of support to their needs."

Support

Amy Coleman, Plains Logging, White Plains, Ga., can attest to reliable support. The company is sizeable, deploying multiple crews on multiple tracts in any given week. Prior to adopting Caribou's system, its office staff used an older software system for keeping up with load tickets, but the system was no longer being actively supported and maintained.

"Caribou's support is great," contends Coleman. "If I call with a ques-

tion or an issue, I can share my desktop securely with them right over the internet, and they can see exactly what I'm looking at, and take control of my machine if they need to. There's no need for them to come to us. They provide assistance instantly with their remote support tools."

She emphasizes that the software is more than a simple load ticket tracking system. She also uses it for other labor-intensive tasks such as the preparation of state timber tax filings and her IFTA tax filings for trucks that travel across state borders. "The IFTA module is wonderful," she says. "You enter your information, push the button, and it automatically does those tedious calculations." She also says that the software has shaved a good half-day a week off her mill reconciliation process, and it allows her to catch errors from mills that her old system could not easily catch. Plains Logging is also looking forward to implementing the equipment costing part of the system in 2007, knowing that it is the next step in increasing the efficiency of their operations.

For more information, contact Caribou Software at caribousoftware.com; phone 706-749-1541. **SLT**