A GUIDE FROM CABINETSHOP MAESTRO

Turn Your Shop Into a Business That Can Run Without You

Brian Haughey · November 2026

Running a cabinet shop gets complicated as the business grows.

More jobs, more employees, more deadlines, and more details to keep track of. What worked when the shop was smaller doesn't always work as well when things get busy.

Before long, too much information lives in people's heads, too many decisions depend on a handful of people, and keeping everything moving becomes a job in itself.

The answer isn't necessarily working harder or hiring more people. It's putting better systems in place so everyone knows what needs to happen, has the information they need, and can take responsibility for their part.

That's what this guide is about.

Seven cabinet shop challenges with practical fixes, starting with a pad of paper and scaling via Cabinetshop Maestro as you grow.

CHAPTER 1

"It's all in my head"

You know where every job is.

Which kitchen is waiting on doors. What the Millers changed last Tuesday. Why the Henderson built-ins can't ship until the hinges show up.

Nobody else does.

That's not a compliment. That's a problem.

Because every one of those things has to pass through you. Every question walks across the shop floor to find you. Every decision waits until you're off the phone.

Here's the shift.

Get out of the middle.

Make it so everyone knows what needs to happen. So they have what they need to make it happen. So they own their part.

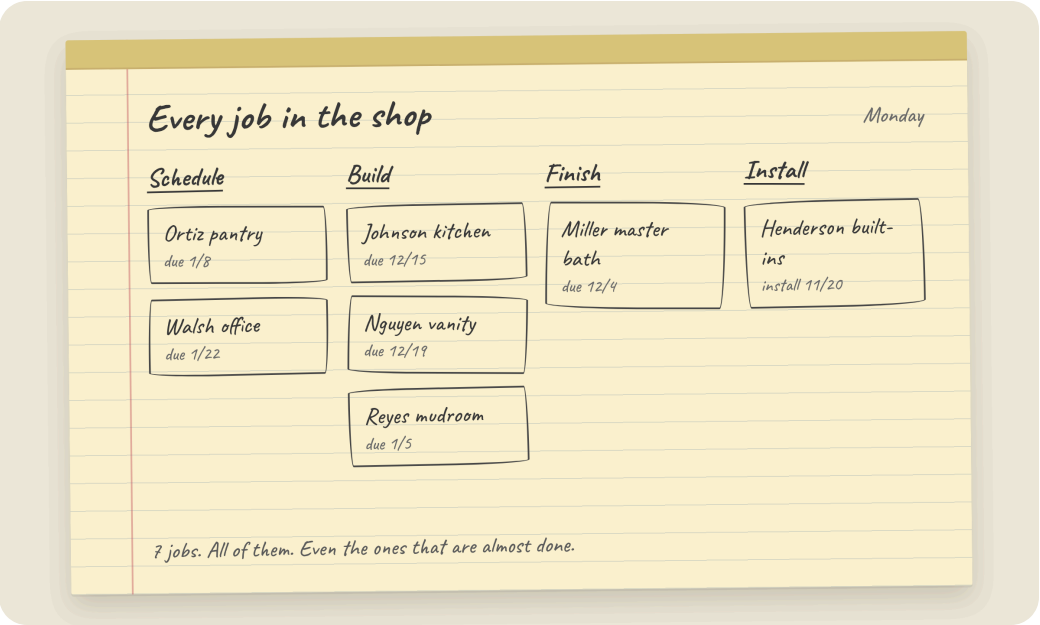
And it doesn't have to go through you.

HOW YOU CAN GET THERE

Take a pad of paper. Draw four columns. Schedule, Build, Finish, Install.

Now write every job in the column it's in. Every one. The one that's almost done. The one that's been sitting in design for a month. The one somebody keeps meaning to call about.

Put a due date under each.



Every active job, on one page

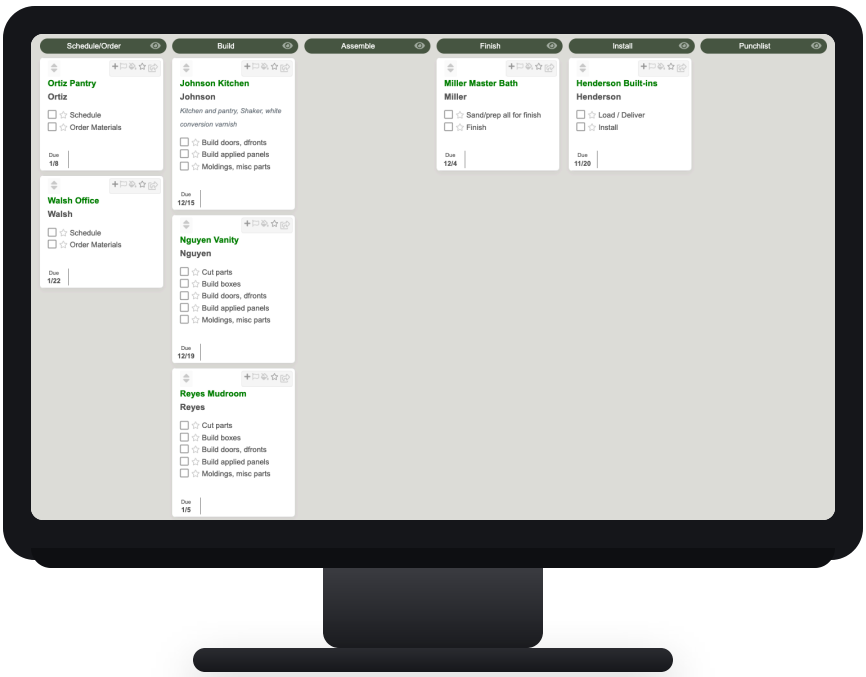
Look at it. That's the start. All of your active jobs on one page, where they are and when they're due, out of your head.

Pin it to the wall and you've already solved half the problem. The crew can see it. The office can see it. You can see it without thinking.

The only trouble is paper doesn't move. When a job goes from Build to Finish, somebody has to cross it out and rewrite it. When you're across town, the list is still at the shop.

THE MAESTRO WAY

Same board. Same jobs. Maybe a few more columns. Plus other boards to see your sales pipeline, but basically the same concept.



The Production Workflow Board

Except the crew can see their jobs and their tasks on their phones.

When tasks are completed and a job moves, everyone's copy moves. Everyone is in sync.

And every job opens into a folder with its rooms, details, drawings, and tasks, so the board is just the top of it.

THE RESULT

Whether you use your pad of paper or Maestro, you have a clearer picture of what's happening across the shop.

Questions about where jobs are become easier to answer. Fewer headaches, and more gets done.

The information is available to the people who need it, when they need it. Not just to you.

CHAPTER 2

"I lose sleep over things we might be forgetting"

It's not the big problems that keep you up.

It's the little ones.

Did someone order the hardware for next week's install? Did the customer approve that finish? Was the drawing updated after the last meeting? Did anyone follow up with the contractor?

The answers are out there somewhere. In an email. In a text. In a conversation nobody wrote down.

So you lie there and run the jobs in your head, one at a time, looking for the thing you missed.

With five jobs going, there's always one.

Here's the shift.

Nothing important depends on somebody remembering it.

Every step is written down, somebody owns it, and it gets checked off when it's done.

HOW YOU CAN GET THERE

Give every job a checklist.

Write down the steps that have to happen, from the first measure to install. Put the small ones on it too. Confirm selections. Order the special hardware. Approve drawings. Schedule the delivery. Follow up on the open question.



One job, one checklist

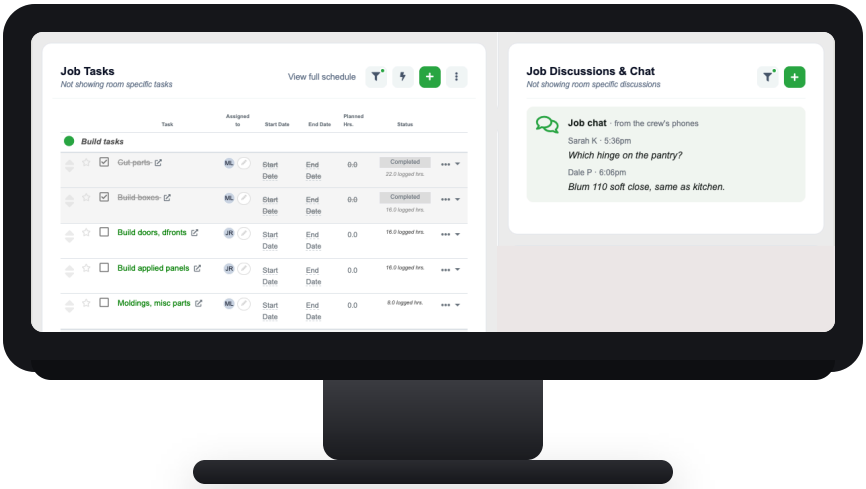
Put a name next to each item. Check it off when it's done.

This isn't paperwork. It's making sure the job doesn't depend on anyone's memory. Including yours.

The trouble is a checklist has to stay current. When three people are working the same job, keeping everyone on the same copy gets hard fast.

THE MAESTRO WAY

Every job has its own tasks, organized around the work your shop does.



A job's tasks, and its discussion beside them

Set up default tasks and the important steps are already there the moment a new job is added.

Assign them. Give them due dates. Check them off from the phone as the work gets done.

Job Discussions keep the questions and decisions attached to the job, instead of in a text thread.

Instead of running jobs in your head at midnight, open the job and look. What's done is done. What's left is right there.

THE RESULT

Less uncertainty about what's next.

The crew knows what's expected. The small stuff stops slipping. And you find the open items before they become a problem, not after.

CHAPTER 3

"We keep making the same mistakes"

The doors came back the wrong color.

Not because anyone's careless. Because the color was decided in a phone call with the customer three weeks ago, and it never made it from that phone call to the finish booth.

The drawer boxes are an inch short. The customer changed the depth at the design meeting. Somebody remembered. The cut list didn't.

Most shop mistakes aren't skill mistakes.

They're handoff mistakes. Something was known. It just wasn't written where the next person would look.

Here's the shift.

Every stage of a job is setting up the next one.

Sales sets up design. Design sets up the cut list. The cut list sets up the bench. When each stage leaves the job complete, the next person just builds.

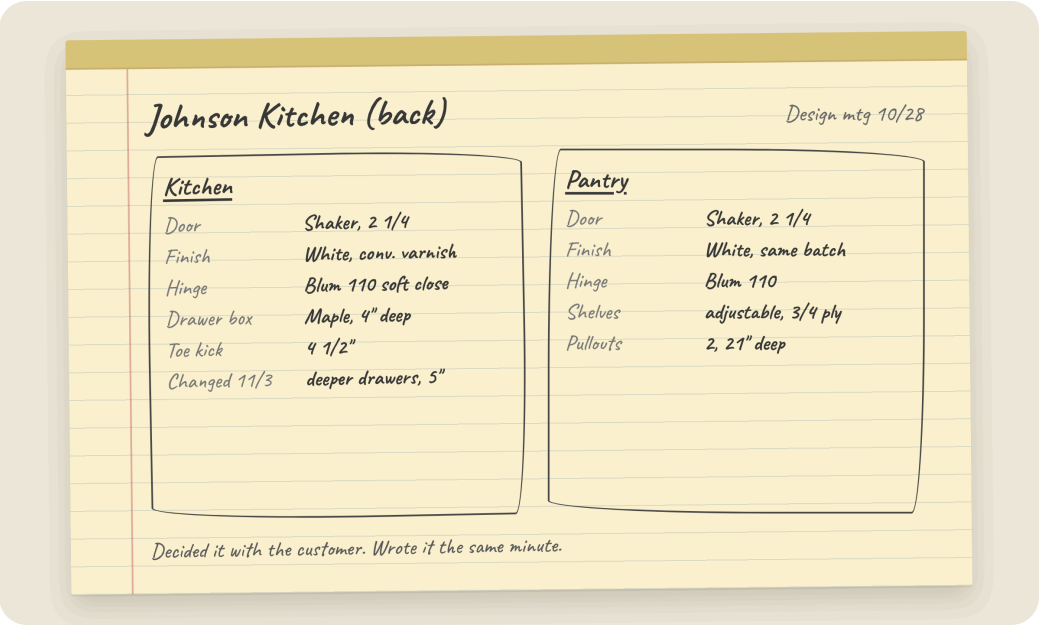
And the person handing it off owns the handoff. If the next person has to come back and ask, the handoff wasn't done.

HOW YOU CAN GET THERE

One sheet of paper per job. Job name across the top. Flip it over.

On the back, one block per room. Kitchen. Pantry. Master bath.

Under each room, the things the bench needs to know and can't guess. Door style. Finish. Hinge. Drawer box depth. Toe kick height. Anything the customer decided.



The back of the job sheet

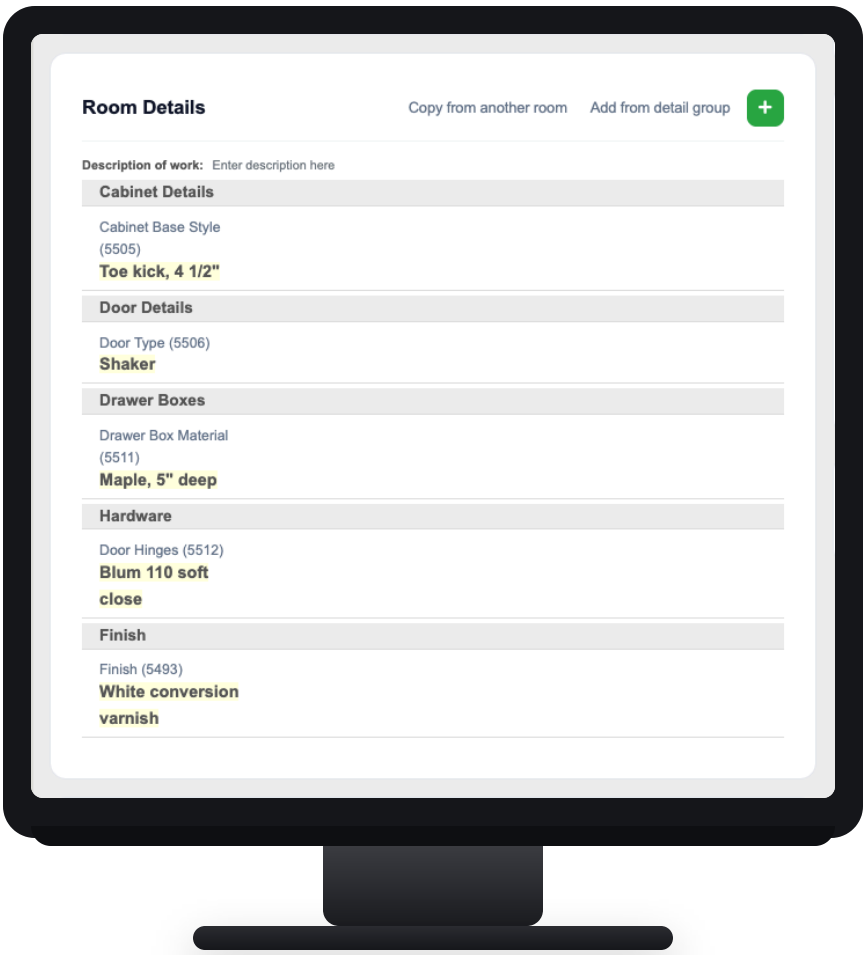
Fill it in while the customer is still on the phone. Not after. The moment it's decided, it's written.

Now when Jose picks up the job, the answer to every question is on the back of the sheet. He doesn't ask. He doesn't guess. He builds.

The problem with paper is the back of the sheet gets full, and the customer calls again on Thursday, and the change gets written on a sticky note that ends up on the floor.

THE MAESTRO WAY

Every job has rooms. Every room has millwork details, and the questions are already there. Door. Hinge. Drawer box and slides. Finish.



Millwork details for one room

They get filled in during the sales stages, while the job is still on the sales board. By the time it moves to production, the folder is complete. The crew opens the room and everything they need is there.

When the customer calls Thursday, you change the answer. The change is there for whoever opens it next.

THE RESULT

Clear communication, fewer mistakes, better work.

CHAPTER 4

"We're always scrambling to meet deadlines"

Every job comes with a date.

The customer has an install date. The contractor has other trades lined up behind you. And the shop has six other jobs moving through at the same time.

Somehow they all need to be done at once.

A job runs long. Material shows up late. The customer changes something. Another install gets moved up.

When you schedule one job at a time, you can't see what one change does to the rest. You find out when the deadline is a week away.

Here's the shift.

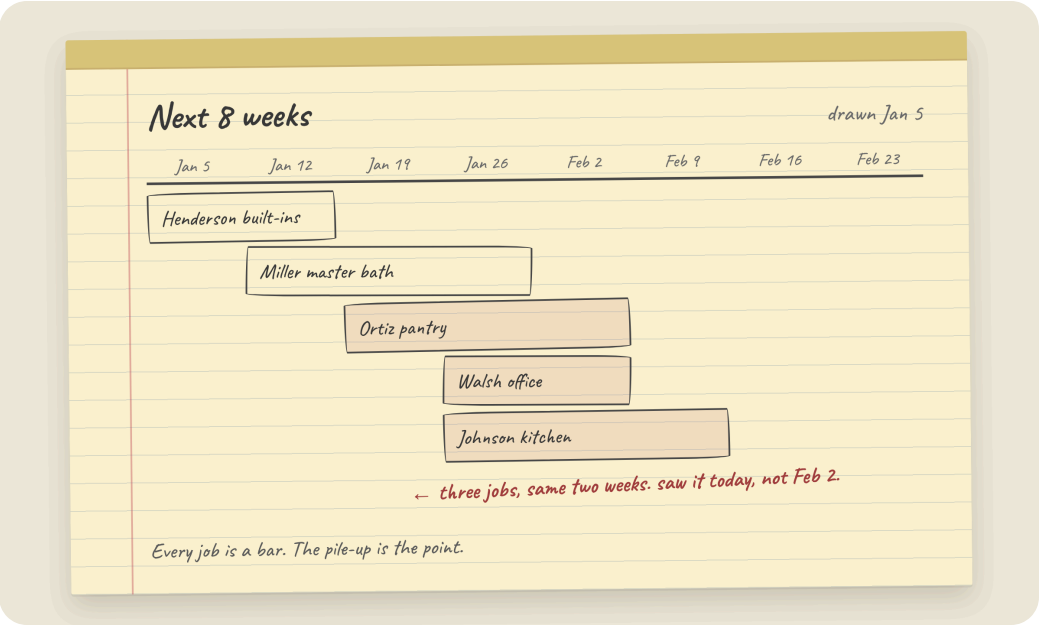
Stop looking at due dates. Look at the workload.

Not when each job is due, but when each job is in each stage, and what else is in that stage at the same time.

HOW YOU CAN GET THERE

Take a sheet of paper. Weeks across the top. Jobs down the side.

For each job, mark the weeks it's in design, in production, in finish, and at install. Use whatever stages your shop actually uses.



Weeks across the top, jobs down the side

Now look at it as a whole.

Three jobs in the finish room the same week? Install stacked at the end of the month? More production scheduled than the crew can get through?

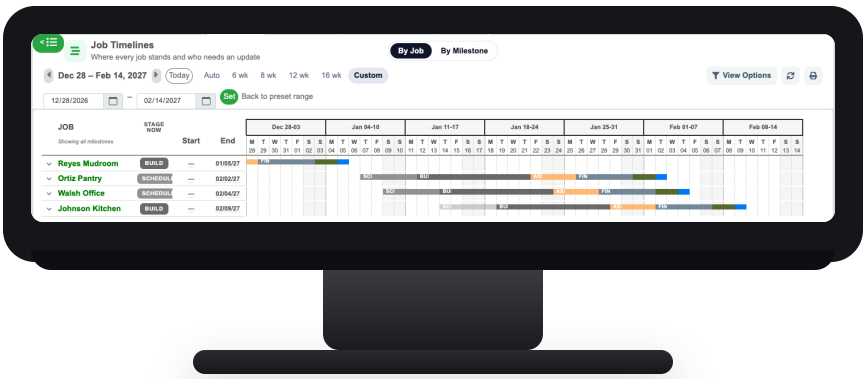
Look at it every week and move things as they change.

The earlier you see the pile-up, the more ways you have to fix it.

The trouble is paper doesn't move, so every change means an eraser. And it's one more sheet somebody has to keep current.

THE MAESTRO WAY

Timelines are that sheet, on a screen.



Timelines, By Job

Set up default timelines for how your shop typically runs a job. Schedule a new job forward from a start date or backward from the install date, and the stages fall into place.

Look across all the jobs and the overlaps show themselves.

When something changes, slide the stage. You don't rebuild the plan.

It won't predict every delay. It makes the workload visible so you see it coming.

THE RESULT

You see the busy weeks before they arrive.

Adjust earlier. Give customers dates you can actually hit. Stop reacting to whichever deadline is closest.

CHAPTER 5

"We're always waiting on something"

The cabinets are done. The hardware isn't here.

Or the finish is backordered. Or somebody just realized the special drawer slides were never ordered.

Now the job sits, the crew works around it, and someone's on the phone trying to find slides.

Half the time the problem isn't that it wasn't ordered. It's that nobody knows if it was. Or when it's coming. Or which job it's for.

Purchasing turns into a string of emergencies.

Here's the shift.

Materials get figured out when the job is planned, not when somebody reaches for the part.

HOW YOU CAN GET THERE

When a job is planned, list what it needs. Mark what's already on the shelf.

For everything else, write down the vendor, the date you need it by, and whether it's been ordered.



What the job needs, and where it stands

Go through the list every week, especially for jobs about to hit production.

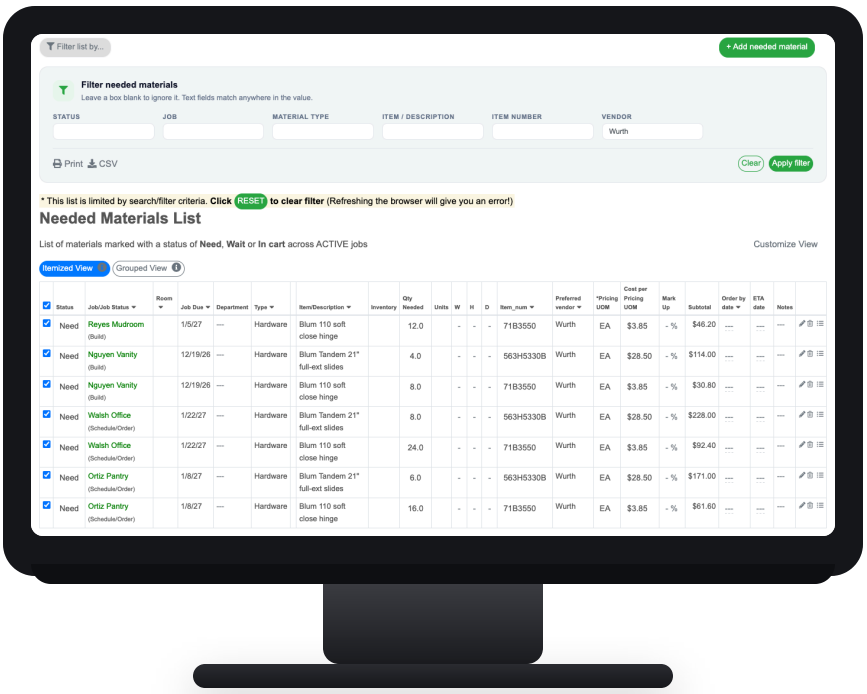
Don't wait until somebody reaches for a part to find out it isn't there.

A simple list prevents most of these delays. If it's kept current. If somebody looks at it.

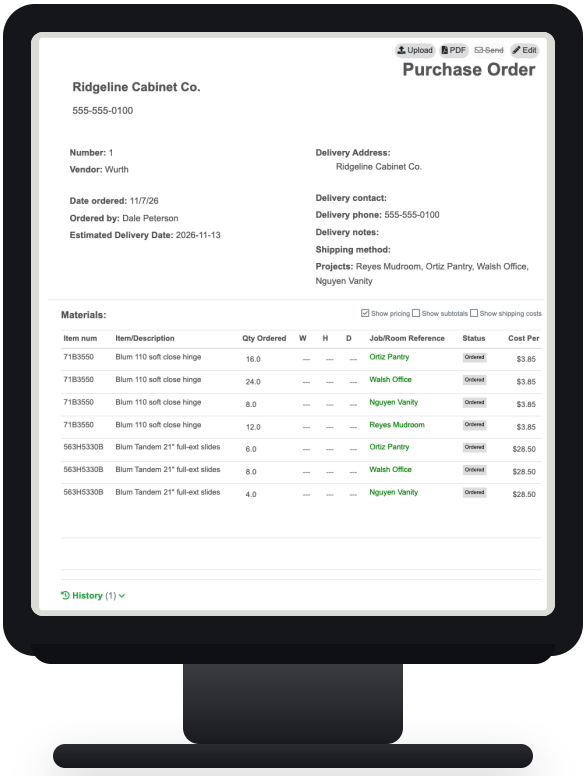
The trouble is the list is for one job, the hinge order is for four jobs, and the list in the office doesn't know what showed up at the dock.

THE MAESTRO WAY

Every job has Needed Materials.



Needed Materials, filtered to one vendor



One purchase order covering four jobs

Tie them to vendors and roll them into purchase orders, including one PO that covers items for several jobs.

As orders go out and come in, the status updates. A partial delivery gets recorded as partial, not as done.

The office sees what's needed, what's ordered, and what's still out.

Purchasing gets handled before it stops production, not after.

THE RESULT

Purchasing is planned instead of reactive.

Materials are far more likely to be there when the crew needs them. Open orders are easy to chase. The crew keeps building instead of waiting.

CHAPTER 6

"I don't know where the hours go"

The Johnson kitchen was quoted at 120 hours.

It took 160. Or 140. Or 190. Nobody knows. It felt long.

So the next kitchen gets quoted at 130, and everybody hopes.

Every shop has a number in somebody's head for how long a kitchen takes. Almost nobody has ever measured it. The number is a feeling, and the feeling is usually low.

Here's the shift.

Hours aren't a feeling. They're a number you write down, on the job, while it's happening.

HOW YOU CAN GET THERE

A clipboard by the time clock. One sheet per week.

Down the side, the crew. Across the top, the days. In each box, the job and the hours. Johnson, 6. Miller, 2.



The clipboard by the time clock

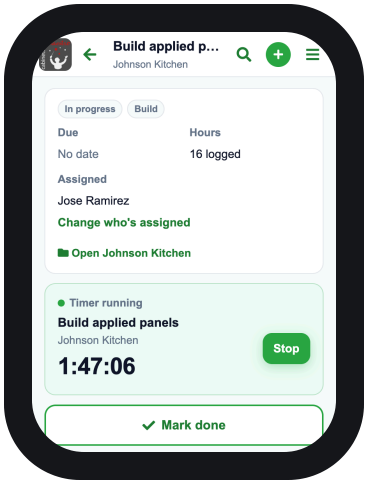
End of the week, add up Johnson. There's the real number. Not 120. Not a feeling. A number.

Do it for three kitchens and nobody quotes from a feeling again.

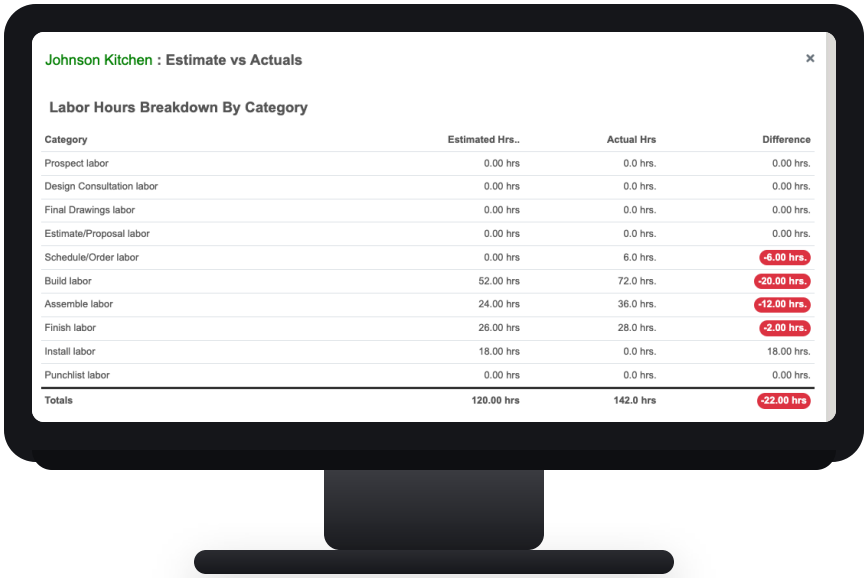
The trouble is the clipboard, the adding up, and the Thursday Jose writes "shop" instead of a job name.

THE MAESTRO WAY

The crew logs time to the task they're on. Start the timer on the phone, or tap in the hours when the task's done. Either way, the hours land on the task, and the task is on the job.



A task timer on the phone



Estimate vs Actual

When the job's done, open Estimate vs Actual. The real hours sit next to the ones that were quoted, stage by stage. Next time, quote from that.

Two catches. It only works if the estimate had labor hours in it, so put them in. And it's a report for the owner and the estimator, not the crew.

THE RESULT

One job has real hours next to the quote, and you've seen the gap.

CHAPTER 7

"Bookkeeping is a mess"

The quote is in a spreadsheet. The deposit is in a text message. The change order is a conversation somebody had in the driveway.

The final invoice is you, at the kitchen table on a Sunday, trying to piece all three together.

And the customer remembers them differently.

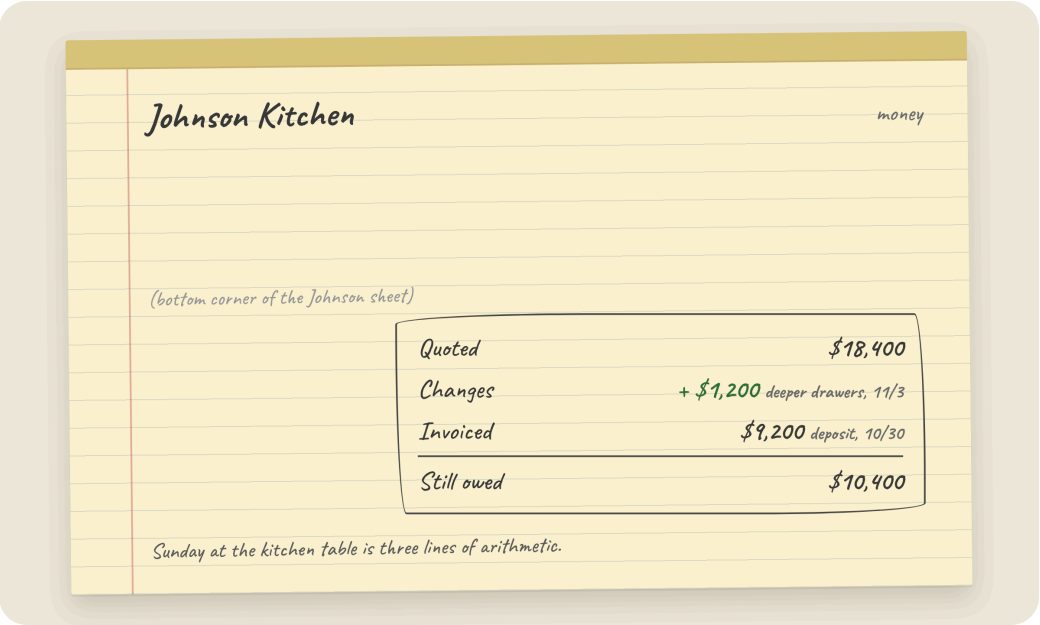
Here's the shift.

The quote, the changes, and the invoice are the same job. They should live on it.

HOW YOU CAN GET THERE

Back to the job sheet from Chapter 3. Front side, bottom corner. Three lines.

Quoted. Changes. Invoiced.



Three lines in the corner of the job sheet

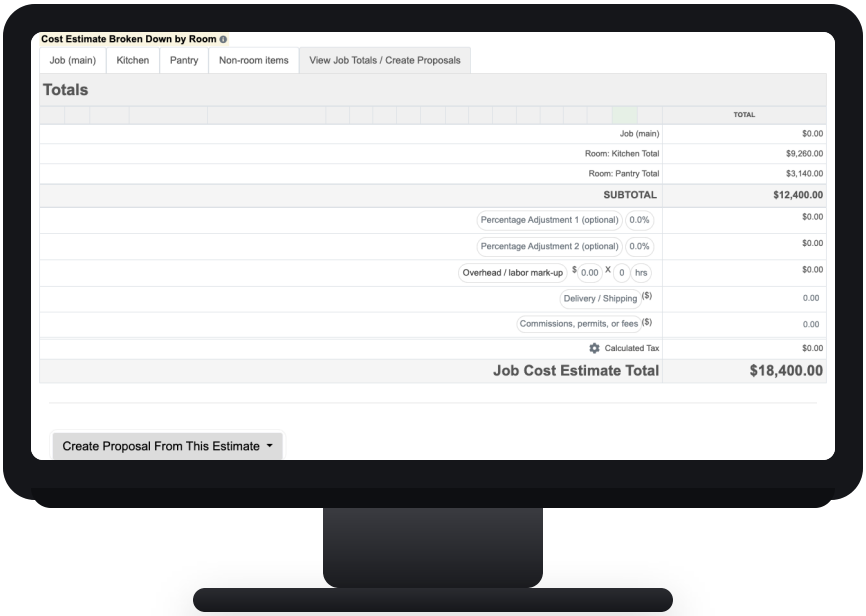
When the customer wants deeper drawers, it goes on the Changes line, with the number, the same day. When an invoice goes out, it goes on the Invoiced line.

Now the Sunday at the kitchen table is three lines of arithmetic. And when the customer remembers it differently, you have the sheet.

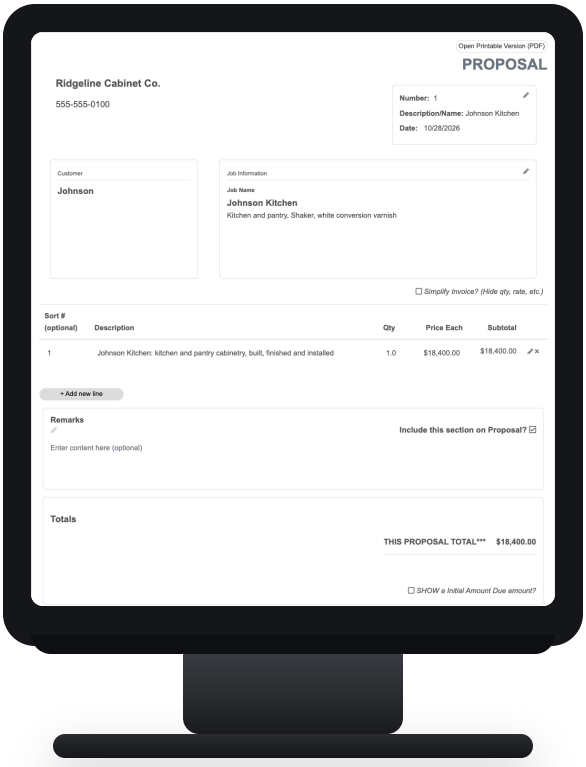
The trouble is the sheet doesn't make the invoice. You still do.

THE MAESTRO WAY

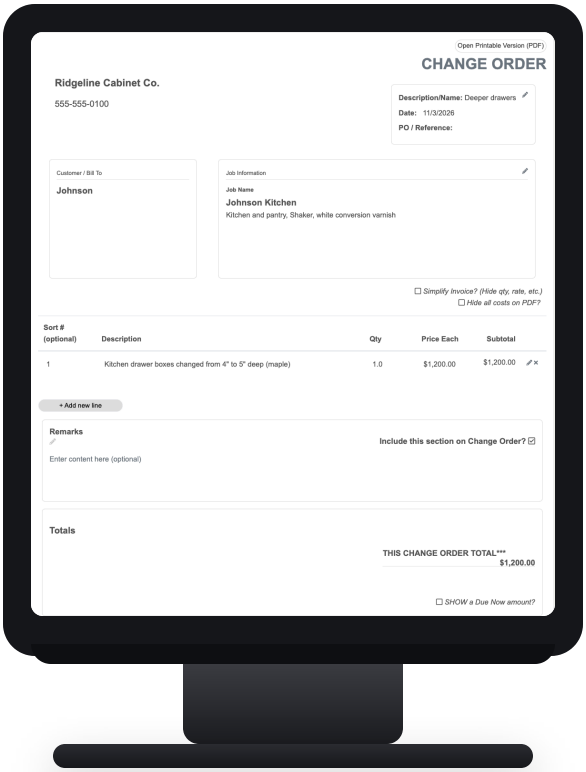
The estimate is on the job. The proposal is made from the estimate. Mark the proposal accepted and the invoice is made from that.



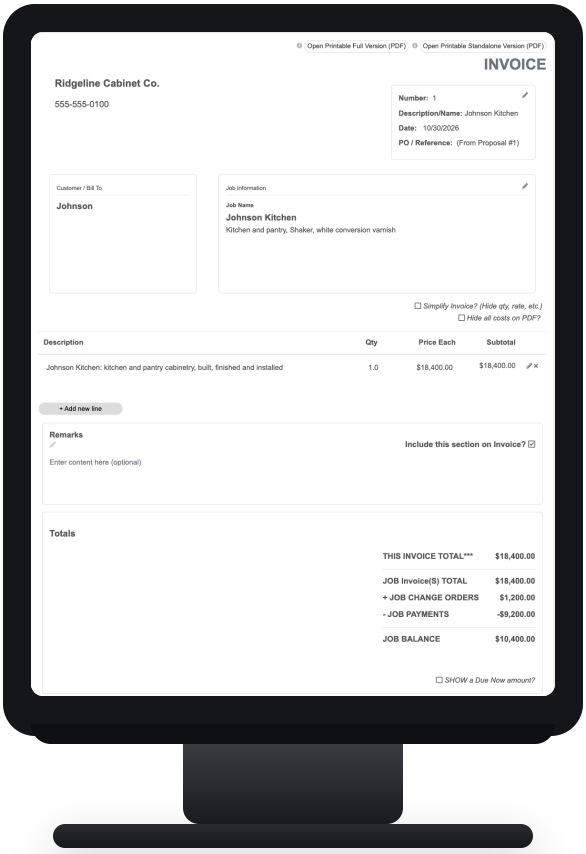
The estimate



The proposal, made from the estimate



A change order, its own document on the job



The invoice, with the running balance

A change order is its own document on the job, not a conversation somebody tries to remember. The invoice shows the running balance with the deposit and the change already in it. Nothing is retyped and nothing is forgotten.

THE RESULT

The final invoice is simple arithmetic.

No spreadsheet. No scrolling through text messages. No Sunday.

Turn Your Shop Into a Business That Can Run Without You

None of these changes will happen overnight. And you don't need to fix everything at once.

Start by getting your jobs organized. Give your crew the information and responsibility they need. Build better habits around scheduling, purchasing, and tracking the work.

As those habits take hold, you'll spend less time answering questions, chasing down details, and putting out fires. You'll have more time to improve your processes, develop your team, and grow the business.

And that's really what this is about.

The next stage of your business starts today.

Let's go.