

A photograph of a busy woodworking shop. In the foreground, a worker in a dark t-shirt and khaki pants is operating a large CNC machine. In the background, another worker in a white t-shirt is near a different piece of equipment. The shop is filled with wood, machinery, and large white storage tanks. The title "Fast out of the gate" is overlaid in large, bold, yellow letters with a white outline.

Fast out of the gate

Creativity brings rapid success to startup architectural woodworking business

By Brooke Baldwin Wisdom

In June of 2007, Custom Source Woodworking opened its doors in Olympia, Wash., with a focus on doing custom work for other woodworking companies. Business went well from the start, so the company decided to expand its horizons and also bid directly on jobs itself. Since then, its successful projects have run the gamut within the architectural woodworking commercial arena – schools, hotels, museums and more. After only 18 months in business, Custom Source Woodworking did \$2.5 million worth of business in 2008, its first full year, with less than 20 employees in a 3,800-sq.-ft. facility. In November of this year production was moved into a new 11,000-sq.-ft. facility and five more employees were added.

Management believes that being a young company requires creativity in how things get done – and that includes creatively working with employees and suppliers as well as equipment and production methods. “Everything must be a total team effort because it’s the people who have made the big difference in this company,” say the owners. “Equipment means nothing without good people running it.” The owners also credit the company’s rapid growth to having built good relationships with their suppliers and using only quality components.

As far as production strategy goes, Custom Source Woodworking’s owners are followers of the Edward Demmings’ continuous improvement management process. “We pour a lot of money into information technology as well,” they say. “One of our first hires was a full-time IT person who is also a soft-

ware developer. We have developed a software program that we now market as well called ‘Crows Nest,’ which is an information management tool for the woodworking industry. This software has been key to our success, giving everyone instant access to information. We developed it as a task-driven application, so when one person is done with his portion of a project, the next person is notified and given a completion date. It also handles payroll, purchase orders and job costing.”

Production becomes increasingly automated

Custom Source Woodworking originally outsourced its CNC work to another woodworking company. All CNC code was produced through its Keytrix estimating/manufacturing software and then fed to the other shop. This fall the company purchased a Busellato JET Optima RT with linear flow automatic load/unload system from Delmac Machinery Group. “The Busellato with the automatic load/unload system dramatically reduces cycle time, because all the operator basically has to do is a final positioning of the in-feed part,” says a company spokesperson. “From there the system feeds the panel in and then feeds it off. So as it is processing the next panel on the CNC bed, the operator can be labeling and de-stacking at the off-feed table.”

The Busellato not only eliminated the need for Custom Source Woodworking to outsource its CNC work, it also expanded its capabilities. “There are a lot of com-

plex things that we couldn't count on the outsourced company to accomplish for us," the owners say. "Examples would be making our own kerfed material or miter folding – items that involve any intricate machining. We also nest grain-matched panels on cabinets so that the drawers and doors all come out of one panel. The code comes directly from our Keytrix software, and that's sent to the CNC machine where the machining is done automatically."


Putting it all together

The assembly department is one area Custom Source Woodworking points to with pride due to its speed and efficiency. At the company's beginning, jigs had to be made and parts were hand-drilled. Delmac's Omal HBD 1300 bore, glue and dowel machine has since been added to improve the process. The code for the Omal is produced at the same time as the code for the Busellato. Barcode labels are applied to the parts, the operator scans the barcode and the Omal runs the process. Cases are assembled with confirmat screws to speed up assembly. The company also uses a Uhling case clamp for finished-end cabinets.

Finishing out Custom Source Woodworking's equipment arsenal is a Striebig vertical panel saw, Timesavers sander, Castle angle bore machine, Homag edge-bander, a Griggio sliding table saw and various other woodworking machines.


The downturn in the economy is not so much affecting Custom Source Woodworkings' business as it is its planning. "We are looking to diversify," says a company spokesperson. "While there is plenty of new construction going on today in our area, we don't want to rely solely on that in the future so we are developing other market channels. As for the future, we don't want to get huge, but we want to remain the best at what we do. When we decided on our location, we hired Gero Sassenberg, a consultant, to lay out our facility. We know that at our current facility we could easily do \$6 million a year, so we're focusing on doing that at this point. We may be expanding out of this facility in five years if that becomes necessary, but otherwise we'll stay where we are and continue to focus on efficiency. We believe that keeping a facility small drives efficiencies throughout the system." **MW**

For more information, circle 388 for Delmac, 389 for Striebig, 390 for Timesavers, 391 for Castle, 392 for Homag and 393 for Griggio, 394 for Keytrix, 395 for Uhling.





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