

USEABLE SPACE

Closet manufacturer expands production capacity to accommodate growth in customer demand

By Brooke Baldwin Wisdom



Closets and More installs its own closets. Turnaround time varies from one week to two months, depending on the project.

People want more closet space — and they want it all to be useable space. That demand is what's driving the success of Atlanta, Georgia-based Closets and More. Started in 1992 by Dan Gehlhausen and his partner, David Gray, the company has found itself sharing that same demand for more useable space due to the need for expanded production capacity.

"We started in a 500-sq.-ft. space only to move after about six months into a 2,500-sq.-ft. space," says Gehlhausen. "We got our first Cehisa edgebander there, and we were so excited that we could get a piece of melamine out of the machine that we didn't have to file by hand. By 1994 we had accumulated a couple of great sales people and a little more machinery. Then we started doing work for a major home improvement center. We then moved into a 7,500-sq.-ft. space where we acquired a SCMI beam saw, SCMI edgebander and an SCMI MB29. We outgrew that space in late 1996 and moved into our present location, which has grown from 12,000 sq. ft. to 26,000 sq. ft. We have 39 employees now and a factory showroom as well as another 2,500-sq.-ft. satellite showroom."

The current facility houses a Mayer PS 9Z beam saw, Homag SE-9300/S2 edgebander, Altendorf F45 Elmo sliding table saw, several boring machines including a Gannomat line drill, a Masterwood CNC machine for some of its special drilling and routing, and other standard small equipment. Grass

Zargen metal systems are used as well as solid wood dovetail drawers.

Closets and More advertises for leads in various magazines or through the home improvement store, builders, professional decorators or designers. Much of its business comes from referrals and repeats. A designer is sent out to take the measurements and meet with the customers to let them know what all the options are. After finding out their interests and what's important to them, the design is done with all the details including accessories to handle all their special requirements.

The production process begins with the part going to the beam saw or CNC machine, depending on the part. The part then moves on to the edgebanding process, then it goes to all the boring machines and gets put into a job box that has all the completed components in it. They are checked for quality and completeness usually three to four days in advance. The closet is then sent out to be installed with Closet and More's own installers and trucks. Turnaround time can vary depending on the project from a week to two months.

"We do really high-end closets with wood veneers and solid doors to the ceiling, crown and flute with pull outs that hold belts, ties and even a full size mirror," says Gehlhausen. "It's totally trimmed out. It's almost like a library type look when we are finished with these type jobs."

"People often want to change from their small closets to a larger one by converting a whole bedroom into a closet. They'll have an island in the center with a lot of drawers and laundry baskets. It's all very useable space. We have an ironing board in a drawer, for instance, and a packing table that will pull out up to 43", which is used to pack a suitcase, fold clothes or just extra space to sort clothes. The closets are made out of mahogany, maple, walnut or cherry veneers. All of the drawer and door faces are made of solid wood."

Closets and More also uses Georgia Pacific melamine — nine of its colors and its color match system. "We have been asking for a color match program since the mid 90's," says Gehlhausen. "People want more wood look-alikes especially in offices and garages and places where wood grain lends itself well. We couldn't get anything to match the melamine. We would get a melamine and try to find a foil to match, but it looked like it was all thrown together. Then Georgia Pacific came out with this program and it's beautiful. The back of the foil doors now match the foil on the front, and it all matches our closet system. It's just working out great."

Software is biggest challenge

Gehlhausen says his company's biggest challenge is with software systems that are geared toward kitchen cabinetry and not closets. "The problem is with software systems," he says. "I haven't found a system that works from presentation to installation. It works for cabinets, but not for closets. You have to have a lot of patience and another software in between to link the two together. It's not user-friendly for someone out there trying to sell. The software doesn't deal with a common vertical panel that most closet systems use very well. You have to build it a stick at a time, which is vertical panel, vertical panel, vertical panel, and then you come back and drop your shelves in. It's very time consuming and if you want to change something, you have to change every little piece in there. I could build a kitchen in half the time it takes me to build a closet. I wish the software companies would focus more on the particular needs of closet makers and particularly the ones that manufacture not just the ones who just use somebody else's catalog. The right software will get our parts list correct and our sizes correct going to our shop as well as door suppliers to eliminate a lot of headaches."



Closets and More's arsenal of equipment, including this Mayer beam saw, is housed in a 36,000-sq.-ft. facility.

A stable workforce is responsible for much of Closets and More's success, says Gelhausen. "I give a lot of credit for our success to our employees," he says. "A family atmosphere is something we really try to foster. We treat our employees like family. That is the main reason for such low turnover. We try to make it a very enjoyable place to work."

As far as machinery goes, Gehlhausen believes Closets and More is in good shape right now. However, the company has some aggressive growth plans for the next five years and will need several pieces to keep up to date and capacity. "We are searching for a screw compressor to give us the capacity needed for future growth," he says. "The finishing systems alone can take a lot of air capacity. Also, we will need at some point a rear load beam saw and another CNC machine to handle all of our drilling and routing. Currently, we have a Gannomat Pro Line 50 that does three-fourths of our drilling. A Masterwood Winner 3.2 currently handles all of our special jobs including all wood veneer complete with angles and radii to accommodate our customers' needs. An IMA HKA handles those curves quite well. Another edgebander will eventually hit the list as we move over the five million mark in 2004."

Closets and More is part of the NCG (National Closet Group). It was one of the original 13 companies to form the organization, which now has almost 50 members. The association is comprised of one company from each major metro area. No direct competitors belong, so topics such as machinery, insurance, taxes, employees and other related topics can be discussed openly. **MW**

For more information, circle Numbers: Cehisa 400; SCMI 401; Mayer 402; Homag 403; Altendorf 404; Gannomat 405; Masterwood 406; Grass 407; Georgia Pacific 408; IMA 409