

CoverStory

Automation multiplies



New equipment and improved processes help a small shop become a multimillion-dollar operation despite the slow economy

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CNC doweling — A big part of the automation transformation at A. Secondino & Son was the addition of this OMAL HBD 1300 boring and doweling machine for fast and accurate joinery.

Shop Snapshot



Company: A. Secondino & Son Inc., Millwork Division

Location: Branford, CT.

Founded: 1929

Proprietor: Al Secondino

Primary products:

Institutional casework and millwork

Annual sales: \$4 million
(Millwork division)

Employees: nine to 12 in shop

Shop size: 9,600 square feet

Key equipment:

- ▶ Busellato JET Optima RT CNC router
- ▶ Casadei ALA 23 edgebander
- ▶ OMAL HBD 1300 boring and doweling machine
- ▶ Timesavers Speedsander widebelt sander

Small shops with a dozen employees these days typically hover on one side or the other of the million-dollar mark in sales. But that's far from the case at the Millwork division of A. Secondino & Son Inc. in Branford, CT. The company's shop runs between nine and 12 men and is on track to do \$4 million in case work this year. The difference is automation.

"Before (automation), we produced a few hundred thousand (dollars) per year," says Shawn Scalora, vice president in charge of the millwork operation. "We did a lot of work with conventional manufacturing but not like this."

And what's even more remarkable is that the change from conventional to automated production has taken less than nine months.

Ticket to transform

Scalora was charged with making the millwork operation an efficient and self-sufficient part of the larger Secondino general-construction operation by owner Al Secondino. At the time the shop was completely conventional, with a standard cabinet-style table saw at the center of production. Scalora knew that major changes were in order if the shop was going to effectively compete.

"We didn't know what to buy but we knew what we wanted to be," he says. He did extensive research and ended up talking with the folks at Delmac in search of an automation solution.

"We wanted a system to suit our needs, and basically we purchased a lean manufacturing system," Scalora says, lauding all the support he got

productivity



Shop Tour

Go online to www.cabinetmakeronline.com/asec.aspx to take a virtual tour of the A. Secondino & Son Inc. millwork shop.

from Delmac to make the project work smoothly. He also applauded the commitment made by the company owner, Secondino.

New tools for new work

The new production system centers on a Busellato JET Optima RT CNC router. The nested-based machine is also equipped with a full-size outfeed table and sweep function, so finished parts can be offloaded by the operator while the machine starts on the next sheet.

Parts are edgebanded in a Casadei ALA 23 edgebander which can do up to 1/2-inch banding. The third leg of the system is the OMAL HBD 1300 bore and dowel machine, which automates joinery and makes for efficient assembly in a case clamp.

Proof of the success of the system is in the productivity. Scalora says the shop can produce as many as 72 cabinets in just five hours. That capacity is essential for the shop as its primary work is large school projects. "We're able to do projects now that we were not capable of doing before," Scalora says. That goes beyond boxes, too, as the shop also uses its CNC capabilities to do curved and other non-standard work.



Router with outfeed — To increase productivity, this Busellato JET Optima RT CNC router has an outfeed table and sweep program. Finished nested sheets of parts are pushed to outfeed table for unloading, freeing up the work table to machine another sheet immediately. Combined with other equipment in the shop, they can build 72 cabinets in five hours.

AWI Premium certification

Lest you get the idea that this huge increase in productivity has come from a sacrifice in quality, Scalora is quick to emphasize the role of the Architectural Woodwork Institute in the shop's transforma-

tion. "AWI was a great help," says Scalora, noting the extensive level of detail required to meet AWI Premium standards that the shop achieves. Scalora maintains that with the precision and repeatability of the shop's

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new automated system, it really doesn't cost that much to achieve the higher quality standard.

Getting the staff on board

Scalora applauds the team effort put in by the employees to make the transformation of the shop work. With the exception of Marc Migiano, the production foreman, the shop workers had no previous computer experience. Now they are all using computers to run their machines.

One strategy Scalora used was to give primary responsibility for particular machines to individual employees. Migiano takes the lead on the CNC router, which was natural because he had some prior CNC experience. But Jimmy Rustic, who is in charge of the new edgebander, and Sebastiano Lantieri, who is in charge of the boring and dowel machine, had no prior automation



Man and machine — Individual operators have primary responsibility for specific machines, such as this Casadei edgebander. Other workers are cross-trained for backup.

experience. While the lead person for each machine has primary responsibility and becomes the shop expert in that area, Scalora also emphasizes cross-training so there is always backup.

Training for everyone in the shop was intense. "I don't think the guys

really know what they've done in the time they have," says Scalora. "We just started this in September."

Scalora says another thing going for the shop is a commitment to keeping the employees working despite economic pressures. "Al remembers how it felt to get laid

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off," says Scalora, speaking of the company owner. Employees work a steady 40-hour week.

Tackling the big job

Scalora says Secondino is fond of saying, "There's no job too big," and many of the projects the shop takes

Leading transformation —
Shawn Scalora led the transformation of the shop from a conventional millwork operation to an automated casework manufacturer, more than quadrupling production in less than nine months.

on are large school casework orders that would present serious challenges to other shops of similar size.

Scalora says the shop makes big jobs more manageable by breaking the job down into smaller parts. Some jobs are divided into three phases.

Parts are drawn in AutoCAD and then the project is broken up by elevation, with the shop working on one elevation at a time. "When we finish the first one we have 18 more just like it to do," says Scalora. "That makes the job much easier to handle."

Whenever possible, the shop also tries to take a proactive approach,

sometimes going so far as ordering material prior to final approvals. This way there is no delay in getting started.

Of course, that also means there is some risk in case something doesn't go quite right.

But Scalora says even when things go wrong that's a measure of the shop's success.

"You have to give people that sense of confidence," he says. "Everyone remembers the things you did wrong. We're only as good as how we can fix our own mistakes." □

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