

Success Story: IMC Transforms Ralph S. Alberts Co.'s Business Processes

written by Lauri Moon | March 17, 2017

For over half a century, the Ralph S. Alberts Company has been one of America's most resourceful, full-service, multifaceted custom molders. Their departments and capabilities include CNC Machining, Custom Molding, Foam Molding, FRP Molding, Hand Casting, Injection Molding and Roto-Casting. Over 50% of their gross business involves manufacturing seating and padding devices for the amusement industry.

IMC has been working with Ralph S. Alberts Company for several years, but more frequently in the past two years in order to transform their business processes through lean and continuous improvement.

Situation

Due to the variation and large volume of amusement parks, rides and themes, Ralph S. Alberts has manufactured over 3,000+ tools to satisfy the needs of that industry over time. It is much more cost-effective to keep and store the tools for future reuse than it is to create a new one. Hence the significant number of tools.

These tools were stored randomly on solid wooden racks and on the floor in a low overhead mezzanine area, adjacent to the primary production area with limited space. There was no standard method for storing or finding a tool, rather each tool was stored where they could find space on the self-constructed wooden shelves.

In addition to being randomly stored, there was no comprehensive list of inventory. Specifications for all of the tools were not recorded in one central location, nor did the individual tools have any unique identifiers. There was a complete lack of organization, and the process for finding any given tool was completely manual.

Since the quantity of tools is significant, and there was no organization system in place, it took multiple employees, together, up to an hour to find the tool they

needed. Sometimes, when they finally found the tool they needed, it was damaged, as a result of the ad hoc storage.

In addition to the primary concern of tool storage and organization, the mezzanine area in which the tools were located was poorly lighted, mostly as a result of the wooden shelves blocking the light.

Seth Alberts, the third generation owner, recognized the company could be more efficient in their tool storage and organization. Each summer, the company set a goal to reorganize and inventory the tooling mezzanine, but due to the demands of everyday business, they never made much progress. An overhaul was needed. Seth did not want to expand their facility, but rather explore options for maximizing their current storage space. In addition to maximizing their current storage space, they wanted to evaluate their current ERP system for possible scanning and location technologies that could help centralize the specifications and location of each tool.

Solution

IMC served as the systems integrator for this project. Since IMC and Ralph S. Alberts Company have been working together for several years, IMC understands the bigger picture of the company - where they've been, where they're going, trends, what works and what doesn't.

The first step was to complete a comprehensive inventory of all existing tools. This inventory resulted in a complex spreadsheet that included the weight, dimensions and information pertaining to the OEM, park customer, ride name and any other relevant information. Each tool was also assigned a unique identifier. While it is cost-effective to keep the tools that haven't been used in several years, they could be separated and stored in sea crates, the first step toward maximizing their current space.

The second step was to address the logistics, with the help of their current ERP system, EstiTrack. IMC contracted Gil Vierra of Business Imperatives Consulting Group, LLC, (BICG) to lead cataloging, defining the best system and evaluating EstiTrack's capabilities as it relates to a more efficient tool storage and organization.

Once Gil had narrowed down the information and categorized what was needed for the shelves, he worked with Seth and Bill DeHaan of APEX Storage, Inc. to research and design the physical shelving. Once the ideal shelving was determined and built, Gil managed the installation process with the help of Melissa Timco, director of operations and sales, and Jason Francis, production coordinator, from Ralph S. Albert Company to ensure tool availability. The company shut down for one week, as employees removed old shelving, installed new lights and the new shelving. Once the shelving was installed, identifiers were added to each of the shelves, and tools were sorted and organized into their new location.

The project was completed in eight months, with a total expense of just under \$50,000.

Results

An investment of just under \$50,000 likely saved the company upwards of \$500,000.

The process of identifying and locating tools, which had previously taken multiple individuals up to an hour, was reduced to taking one person a matter of minutes. As a result, they have been able to schedule work more efficiently, which has enabled them to reduce lead times, in some cases by two weeks. The reduction in time and labor connected to the increased efficiency will also allow them to increase their overall net profit margins.

Furthermore, by maximizing their current space, they eliminated the need for a building expansion to accommodate their growing number of tools.

In summary, their notable results to date include:

- Increase storage capacity by 125%
- Eliminated the need for building expansion
- Reduced tool find and retrieve process from one hour to minutes
- Reduced time and labor costs
- Created two new Tooling Librarian positions
- Reduced lead time (by up to two weeks)

In addition to the dramatic improvement to their tooling inventory and organization,

many employees were inspired and empowered as a result of helping with this project. Through the process, employees learned ways to improve their own workspaces, and are more conscious of the difference maximizing space and organization can make. With the help of IMC, the culture at Ralph S. Alberts was improved.

“We believe this will be a step towards decreasing our COGS, increasing our sales and ultimately maximizing our margins,” said Seth. “These larger margins will allow us to invest in similar projects in the future, so we can carry on in our journey of continuous improvement. We want to thank IMC for all of their efforts in helping us accomplish our goals.”