Profiles

Precision Molded Plastics

By Dan Sanchez | Jul 15, 2019

Aerospace & Electronics | Bioscience & Medical | Building & Construction | Food & Beverage | Industrial & Equipment

Company Details

Location	Founded	Ownership Type	Employees
Upland, California	1979	Private	11-50

Products

Aerospace, Agriculture, Building Supplies, Construction, Consumer Goods, Defense, Food & Beverage, Industrial, Medical/Dental, Irrigation

www.precisionmoldedplastics.com

Upland, California

Founded: 1979

Privately owned

Employees: 25

Industry: Contract Manufacturing

Products: Injection-molded plastic parts

President and CEO David VanVoorhis has revived the family business with automation and Lean techniques as he looks to pivot to more sustainable materials.

Celebrating its 40th anniversary, Precision Molded Plastics started with two molding machines in 1979, and now operates across a 25,000-square-foot facility with capacity to produce hundreds of thousands of plastic parts in a day.

“My dad started the company when I was 10 years old,” says VanVoorhis. “I came in every day after school pulling runners [leftover material from the molding process] and grinding them down manually.”

When VanVoorhis took over the company in the early 2000s, it was in severe decline, operating at less than 3 percent capacity. He was able to save it from closing by adopting aggressive sales strategies, acquiring two key competitors, and implementing new training and manufacturing processes.

“When I first took over the business, it was ready to shut down,” says VanVoorhis. “Customer acquisition and implementing Lean manufacturing techniques allowed the company to get back on its feet.”

He credits Austin-Corp., a Los Angeles-based consulting firm, and California Manufacturing Technology Consulting (CMTC) for helping turn the company around. “Utilizing the Lean efficiencies we learned from reaching out to CMTC is one of the things that helped us get to a point where we now are experiencing 23 percent compounded growth over the past 15 years.”

Automation has been another key driver of the comeback, he adds. “Compared to what we had in the past, our servo-driven injection molding machines are capable of efficiently manufacturing an intentionally diverse mix of products from wiring grommets to aerospace parts, components for medical devices, and much more. We're striving for a hands-off operation, so we invest heavily in automation equipment. Robotic arms on the molding machines remove the byproduct and drop it into a granulator machine. It's then chopped up and mixed back into the system to eliminate waste.”

With its automated processes, Precision Molded Plastics performs “lights-out manufacturing” with robotics and a conveyor system that allows it to continue to run automatically during those periods. The company has also received an ISO 9001:2015 certification.

While automation is key to the company's success, Precision Molded Plastics is staffed by many longtime employees. “We have an amazing staff, some of the best people in the industry,” says VanVoorhis. “Some of them have been here for more than 25 years.”

VanVoorhis credits Lean and Six Sigma processes that have been implemented by the entire staff. “Every three to four weeks, the whole company attends four to six hours of value stream mapping, kaizen events, up-skill training and more,” he says. “Different subjects are covered, and it really helps us to be more efficient, to improve our employee safety, and to create less waste so our carbon footprint is reduced. We are thinking about going after the Shingo Prize for Operational Excellence next.”

According to VanVoorhis, every efficiency technique that can be adapted to the company's needs is utilized, no matter how insignificant it might seem. “Our goal is to make this workplace boring,” he says. “It sounds strange, but the less activity, the more efficient it is. We standardize as much as we possibly can. Additional training allows employees to handle more than one operation, and there are simple work instructions on machines so anyone can come up to it and be able to see what it is supposed to be doing, without going through a time-consuming learning curve.”

VanVoorhis also established a weekly scorecard for the company to track operational performance as well as finding additional areas needing improvement. “Our customers want more and expect more, so we've really had to work to knock it out of the park,” he explains. “For us, being Lean and efficient really impacts the bottom line in a positive way.”

Challenges: “Overseas competition forces us to cut out the fat and to be competitive in price,” says VanVoorhis. “We're forced to improve and to be efficient in order to be competitive as much as we possibly can. We're not rock-bottom pricing, but we are the best at providing massive value to our customers. We go head to head with everybody by delivering a quality product on time, and at a fair price.”

Opportunities: “Bioresin is getting larger, and by 2025, we want to be able to produce 25 percent of the products we make using it,” says VanVoorhis. “Bioresins include new biodegradable and compostable plastic families, which may serve as smart alternatives to traditional plastic. This really hasn't gained much traction in the market yet, even though the materials are competitive. Nevertheless, we intend to aggressively pursue it.”

He adds, “There are also significant opportunities in reshoring. We currently are working with companies who have their manufacturing done offshore and are bringing business back to the United States because it is more cost-effective for them considering their total landed costs of overseas production.”

Needs: “Getting the right people into the right seat,” says VanVoorhis. “We're always looking for the right people. Sometimes we'll pick up someone for a seat that's not available yet, knowing they will bring value to the organization.”