

## Leap of Finishing Faith

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Jason Dugle knows that timing is everything when it comes to manufacturing.

In 2008, the president of Cincinnati-based Deltec Inc. decided to add a finishing line to his company's manufacturing facility. This was during the midst of one of the worst recessions in U.S. history.

But he probably couldn't have picked a better time to do it.

"Those were some lean times, especially when it comes to adding equipment and spending money," says Dugle, a third-generation president of the company. "But there comes a time when you have to make a decision, and it's turned out to be a pretty good one."

Deltec is a full-service fabrication and manufacturing company, specializing in stainless steel and mild steel parts manufacturing. By combining high-powered laser capabilities with CNC bending, punching and machining technology, it was able to provide customers with precision fabrications without much trouble.

But when Dugle saw the endless trucks hauling away parts to be finished for his customers, he realized that outsourcing the work was starting to be somewhat problematic.

"Sending parts out to be powder coated and finished was taking time, and often we just didn't have that luxury," he says.

Again, timing was everything. Jason's father, Chris Dugle, had purchased a powder coating business nearly a decade earlier and had run it as a separate operation at a plant about 10 miles away. Deltec was shipping some items there, but also sending parts to be coated much farther away, often having a negative impact on lead time and deliveries.

At about the same time, Deltec brought on sales manager Joe Pouliotte, who had some experience with parts finishing. He and Jason quickly agreed that to move Deltec forward they needed to have some type of in-house powder coating operation to speed things along and to better control quality.

"It was definitely going to be a time-saver for us, but also give us improved control over how we moved our customer's parts through the process from start to finish," Pouliotte says. "It's all about the customer."

Dugle decided to close the powder coating business his family owned and move the now one-man operation to the Deltec plant. But that was easier said than done.

First, neither Dugle nor Pouliotte was as up on finishing technology as they had hoped to be, so they began reading trade publications, Products Finishing magazine being one of them. They read about a trade show within driving distance and decided to attend to check out vendors, ask questions and kick some tires.

"Reading about the products was extremely helpful, but it was also good to see the ads and then go to the show and talk to the people in the ads," Pouliotte says. "We asked a lot of questions, and we came away with an idea of what we needed to get things moving."

Dugle and his staff quickly realized that what equipment to buy wasn't the only decision that needed to be made. They had to first find space in their plant to house a finishing department, and then retrofit the facility to have it work properly.

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That meant purchasing a cleaning and pretreatment station, which would require excavating concrete and installing a draining system. They also purchased a new powder coating booth from Nordson, and moved their older oven from its former plant and installed it in their manufacturing facility.

The entire process took about six months from the time they got the idea to the point when the equipment was ready. But then they had to make sure they knew how to use the equipment properly to get the best finishes for customers.

“Nordson was great in training our people, and Calvary Chemicals was our chemical supplier that did a fantastic job of making sure things were installed properly and that we knew how to properly maintain the system,” Pouliotte says. “One of the keys we found was getting the right people to work with you to help get things installed, people trained and the system working the right way.”

Other manufacturing companies have also taken the plunge into adding finishing operations in-house.

Prototek Sheet Metal Fabrication of Contoocook, N.H., added powdercoating, painting and a RoHS-compliant plating line to its facility to help control quality and delivery, says Bruce Isabelle, president and CEO.

Founded in 1987, the company specializes in rapid prototypes, short runs and quick turn-around products, and has expanded twice in its current 40,000-sq-ft facility.

“We have access to all the major hardware and accessory lines, and can provide paint and powder coat finishes as well as a full complement of plating,” Isabelle says. “We have clear and colored anodizing; chromate and zinc and chromate; hardcoat; electroplate; electroless nickel; copper, tin, silver, gold, and nickel.”

Deltec’s Dugle is satisfied with the streamlined workflow and the capabilities that the finishing system has provided over nearly three years.

“The most compelling issue with the work we do is lead time,” he says. “The customer gives you a schedule that you have to follow very closely to make them happy, but we have to be extremely conscience of our part quality. Adding our finishing line has kept us more in tune to the turnaround our customers needed, and maintained our quality reputation.”

Customers have also noticed a difference and are pleased with the results, and Pouliotte has been able to snag a few more customers by up-selling in-house powder coating capabilities to potential clients. Overall, Dugle says he can quantify that the additional service provided to his customers due to the powder coating system has been a smart investment, even if it was made in the worst of economic times.

Deltec’s logo is six triangles and three triangles all set within one larger triangle.

“The six triangles represent our operations: laser/punch, bending, machining, welding, finishing and powder coating,” he says. “The three triangles represent our principles: honesty, integrity and quality, and the large triangle represents the Holy Trinity.”

Understandable for a company that took a leap of faith and watched it pay off.

From the desk of Tim Pennington