IDENTIFYING OPPORTUNITIES AND RESPONDING QUICKLY

PACIFIC SOUTHWEST CONTAINER RELIES ON NEW INNOVATIONS FROM SUPPLIER COMPANIES LIKE GEO. MARTIN TO MAXIMIZE PRODUCTIVITY.

BY NICK GRIFFIN

Bryson Crawford, Vice President in charge of manufacturing for Pacific Southwest Container, likes keeping his company nimble. "In the markets we serve, changes can come quickly. We don't spend a lot of time trying to figure out what might happen in the future because when we identify areas where we can make money, we get in quite quickly," explains Crawford. "Companies can spend a lot of time planning and then by the time the future gets here everything has changed anyway."

"WHEN WE IDENTIFY AREAS WHERE WE CAN MAKE MONEY, WE GET IN QUITE QUICKLY," SAYS VICE PRESIDENT OF MANUFACTURING BRYSON CRAWFORD.

Operating three California plants in Modesto, Visalia and Stockton, Pacific Southwest Container (PSC) has approximately 760 employees companywide. Crawford states categorically, "We offer our customers a full spectrum of packaging — a one stop shop in other words. Everything from folding carton to heavyweight corrugated, displays and protective packaging, with the exceptions of perhaps bags and rigid boxes, we're not in those businesses. We sold $220 million worth of packaging last year."

Between its three facilities, PSC operates a 98-inch Fosber corrugator, four singleface laminators, six sheet fed lithographic presses, a web fed litho press, four flexo folder-gluers, three rotary diecutters, and 12 flatbed diecutters. "Adding up the sum capability of our plants is what makes us formidable. And it's certainly part of our operating plan to have a fair amount of duplication up and down the valley," says Crawford.

Although located in the heart of California's robust produce industry, PSC describes agriculture products as accounting for only about 20% of its sales. "In covering the central valley, certainly we do some fruit, vegetables and other perishables, but by virtue of our locations, wine and spirits are a big deal for us. We also have a customer base that includes snack and nutrition products, high tech consumer goods, general manufacturing, a lot of display work including assembly, and even some automotive. The agricultural side has really driven our displays. When I talk about displays, it's more than just shelf displays, we make a lot of end caps and standees that sit in the middle of an aisle in grocery stores."

In addition to serving its base of customers stretching from Northern California down to Bakersfield, Crawford explains, "We presently ship to the East Coast and, at last count at least seven different countries. Big tech companies are comfortable with us producing their boxes and have been for many years now." It was mentioned that PSC had served one leading computer company that had gone through multiple packaging phases over the years, even 15 years ago, making brown look "gorgeous." Smiling, Crawford responds, "Yes we have."

Productivity Enhancements

Quality and control at every stage are characteristics evident in all of PSC's operations. This is key to the company's addition of Geo. Martin LBX Scrubber Stackers™ in two of its locations. "The LBX stackers were originally designed, built and sold as rotary diecutting's answer to getting scrap out of the loads, which they do quite effectively. But the reliable removal of scrap is only one issue for us and while that's certainly an important factor, that alone doesn't pay off our investment in them." Crawford stressed unequivocally that he sees blank control as their primary benefit. "Once the LBX wheels get a hold of the sheet, it has positive control all the way through. This enables us to reliably run more across at high speeds, without any nicking to hold the individual pieces together. Other stackers can say that they can do that, but the time it takes to set up — the amount of time you spend down because of jam-ups and other things — really didn't make our level of productivity feasible until the LBX.

"We purchased our two (LBX) Scrubbers because they changed the way we ran jobs," he continues. "We went from four out to eight, and on smaller boxes from eight to twelve. We've effectively been able to better use the width of the diecutters with the Scrubber than our old stacker could handle. It's all through having complete control of the sheet," according to Crawford. "From the time that product leaves the nip of the diecutter and enters into the Scrubber, it's in the positive grip of the Scrubber wheels, holding it in position. There are no belts to get tangled up on wings, unusual shapes and things. The stacker delivers product to the transfer deck and from

there, it gets separated. This kind of sheet control isn't possible without the LBX because everything else I looked at still uses layboy belts."

He expands, "What I saw in the Scrubber was a new technological change from what typical stackers have been for 20, maybe even 30 years using layboy belts that just couldn't fully control the sheet. And when you can't control the blank, multiple outs and strange configurations get tangled up with belts and you have slower speeds and more jam-ups so you're losing production."

Neither of PSC's high-speed diecutters with LBX Scrubber Stackers use bundle breakers. "The Scrubbers allow us to run multi-outs without the need to nick them together," states Crawford. "It simply brings the blanks out straight, sets them down on the transfer deck and then it separates them. We can control the stacker's operations electronically, even while we're running and that saves the setups so the next time we have a repeat job, our best run settings are already stored, meaning setup times come down dramatically."

Unique Pallet Inserter

Crawford and PSC had another need besides the LBX stackers and this need was credited for driving the development of a new type of pallet inserter, which was first installed in the Modesto plant and shortly thereafter added to the Visalia diecutter line. "Most of our customers rack their product and nobody has 110-inch wide racks. You're not going to get the customers to change to their pallet size. You have to adapt to theirs," points out Crawford.

"Geo. Martin is a good company and they really do stand behind their products," he says. "When we got into this they offered different options that didn't quite get us where we needed to be. At first they couldn't supply what I needed a pallet inserter to do. So, based on our initial request, they set about to engineer what we needed and what we'd asked for — a pallet inserter that inserts two pallets simultaneously. So what I was running as a four out onto one pallet, I can now run as an eight out onto two separate pallets. The customer still gets his jobs on the 48- x 40-inch pallet, and because we're able to take pallets two at a time we've increased production. I think this was unique and it was something that hadn't been developed before. Getting two pallets in and out of the stacker at the same time, without interrupting the feed, was huge."

Feedback from the operating floor is that the new technology makes the operators' jobs easier. According to Jason Thalls, PSC Visalia's Operations Manager, "Our operators feel a lot more satisfied. We have a throughput compensation package that brings us all together in a common effort to produce as much as we can. The operators enjoy a financial benefit directly from that. Their jobs are a lot easier plus they can get more done in less time with complex as well as easy setups."

Crawford describes his company's position as, "a better business model in the midst of a very competitive market. The quicker we can stay on top of changes and the more ways we can maximize our productivity, the brighter our future and potential for growth." ■