

## M&M Tool and Mold: Specialization and Short Leadtimes Yield Success

This small tool shop builds complex molds quickly and efficiently, a talent that won them MoldMaking Technology magazine's Leadtime Leader Award.

**SHERRY BARANEK**

Senior Writer, *MoldMaking Technology* magazine



M&M Tool and Mold features unique offerings as well as state-of-the-art equipment and key employees in its formula for success.

When M&M Tool and Mold, Inc. (Green Bay, WI) co-owners Mike Richard and Marty Ciriacks are asked how their 14-

person tool shop has thrived for the past eight years, their answer is short but sweet: automation, specialization and customer service. Without delving into these areas, this plastic injection mold builder would not be able to boast a five- to seven-week leadtime for multi-cavity production tools and certainly not have a 99 percent on-time delivery rate. Further testament to its accomplishments is \$1.7 million in sales in 2001 and past growth rates: 32 percent from the 1998-1999 fiscal year, 40 percent from 1999-2000, 13 percent from 2000-2001, and an estimated 88 percent from 2001-2002.

The company also specializes in more unusual molds like four-slide Dynacast and Techmeyer, which Ciriacks says are self-contained, zinc die casting units able to hold very tight tolerances that usually have multiple side action from several directions. In addition to unique offerings, state-of-the-art equipment and smooth shop flow, specialized positions and key employees are the main ingredients in this moldmaker's formula for success.

## **Company Creation**

Like many mold shops, Richard and Ciriacks established M&M in a 750-square-foot garage with a mill, an EDM and a grinder in January of 1995. In the business since 1983, they had served apprenticeships at the same shop before breaking out on their own. One month later they were awarded a large three-mold package. "It was really neat," Ciriacks recalls. "The company owner we were working with saw himself in us - like when he was starting out on his own - and gave us the project based on our character." Two months later, they moved to a 2,500-square-foot building and hired their first employee. The company's current building was built in 1997, with employees added throughout the years. According to Richard, the company has been on a "serious climb" since then.

"Our competition is a few shops in Wisconsin that are our size and that stay current with technology," Richard notes. "We've responded with high-tech machines and our 99 percent on-time delivery rate. There are only a few shops our size with our extent of automation. We are only the second shop in Wisconsin with a Mitsubishi EDM with silicon powder finishing capabilities."

These high-tech machines also include a new wire EDM with an auto-threader for lights-out operation, an Okada graphite machine interfaced with a 114-position 3R robot, a CNC sinker EDM interfaced with the robot, another EDM with a 32-position electrode changer for long runs and two Hurco VMCs with a conversational control for very quick steel prep.

## Enthusiastic Employees

According to Ciriacks, everyone in the company maintains a positive attitude. "Our customers don't want to hear how slow it is out there, or about China or how it used to be," he comments. "The fact that there are two owners gives us the flexibility of one of us always being here to talk to customers while the other is able to go out and meet with someone at any time. We put a lot of miles on our trucks servicing our customers. The feedback we hear is that we are honest and positive."

To maintain smooth workflow, M&M's designers and programmers work closely together - usually programming on jobs in the very infant stages of a design. "We also are cutting steel before the complete design hits the floor," Richard says. "We try to do everything we can here, so we don't lose time sending things out. The only thing we outsource are mold bases. We use an aggressive mold base manufacturer that can ship it complete in three weeks. Two years ago we addressed the issue of keeping everything in-house for leadtime purposes. We would lose two to three days sending components out for various reasons.

"We've basically become self-sufficient in regard to all aspects of building a mold," Richard continues. "We have certain guys doing certain things that a lot of bigger shops do - designing, running EDMs, programming, cutting electrodes and cutting steel. We have been fortunate to have some employees who - while serving an apprenticeship - realize that they like a certain area of moldmaking (like wire EDM or programming) and this becomes their specialty. We have lead man toolmakers that run the jobs through the shop and several key employees that go above and beyond the call of duty. They will stop back at night and check machines or change electrodes. I can't say enough about how great they are and how their efforts help workflow. These guys realize that at times extra effort is needed because that's the way things are now - fast."

## Smooth Sailing

Recently, foreign competition has posed a bit of a challenge to M&M. "Previously, overseas tooling issues hadn't affected us," Richard states. "However, our quality and leadtime allow us to deal with this. We may not be able to compete on price, but we certainly can make molds as fast and our quality is there as well as immediate customer service."

Future plans, states Ciriacks, include adding more key employees. "We recently hired a design apprentice," he notes. "We'd also like to expand our sales nationally, either by adding satellite offices or expanding our sales force. We currently have a customer in California. Five or 10 years ago, nobody talked about it, but times are changing. We also are exploring a specialized mold that's being made in Europe."

Richard adds that the company's current building was built with the back wall able to expand - thus opening up the possibility for a larger facility. This may become a necessity for this up-and-coming moldmaker that already has it all - building complex molds with short leadtimes and hitting delivery times with exceptional customer service.