

Top of the game

With fabricators constantly updating machinery, it is considered important for Stuga to continue to update its range of automatic sawing and machining centres. We are targeted by our competitors as ‘the one to beat’ in the UK PVC-U fabrication machinery industry. With most competition coming from Europe and some from Turkey and China, we have a lot to stay ahead of, writes Steve Haines

One factor that appears clear is that much of the PVC-U window and door industry is consolidating with large organisations being created out of takeovers and amalgamations. This is particularly so for fabrication and 2017 saw the continuation of this trend. These regional fabrication facilities need good and fast technology to maximise output from the space available and at present many seem to be prepared to invest in capital equipment.

The instinct for smaller fabricators is often to hold off up-dating equipment because of uncertainties in the market. On the other hand PVC-U fabrication is surely into the survival of the fittest? So investing is vital for those that haven't done enough to keep their production facilities up with the times. In fact quite a lot of investment that is happening or needed is to replace obsolete or worn out equipment which is slowly but surely dragging efficiency down for some fabricators.

In the last two to three years it has been noticed that successful Stuga fabricators are choosing top of the range machines where they have the volumes to justify them. The fabricators purchasing these new machines have clearly had the vision to reinvest and been planning considerable capital investment on an ongoing basis which is why they are at the top of their game. To stay in the front line of sawing and machining supply Stuga has invested to develop its range and we now believe we have the largest range of PVC-U sawing and machining centres offered by any machinery company.

We find it is necessary, constantly, to update customers



Steve Haines

regarding the latest developments. Keeping them aware that we are continuously up-dating machines with the latest technology ensures customers are not comparing old Stuga technology with a competitor's latest offering. As an example the latest Stuga ZX5 sawing and machining centre can produce around double the output of the original Stuga 'Flowline' model widely sold in the early 2000s.

The Stuga range now starts with the AutoFlow-2 compact centre where space is at a premium but all sawing and machining functions are required without compromise. It then moves through the medium output ZX3 to the high output ZX4 and finally to the top of the range ZX5 which is not only high output but can have other options like upgraded tooling and more advanced extraction. The ZX5 is

significantly quicker than ZX4 models sold only a year ago. Accuracy and reliability are also improved and new features added to further enhance the experience such as profile width measuring, new gripper and a new 'Y' notch system.

All our machines come with internet enabled diagnostics and on-board cameras but importantly there are many technicians at Stuga that are trained and have

the skills to use these facilities throughout each and every working day. □



Money in the machine

European manufacturers are estimated to spend over €400bn every year on maintenance activities. Studies show that typically 30% of failed machinery can be repaired at half the cost of buying replacements, which suggests a potential 15% saving. John Mitchell, business development manager at CP Automation, discusses the issues that stop manufacturers cutting costs and improving productivity – the essence of lean manufacturing

Perhaps the first thing manufacturers should consider when addressing efficiency is keeping assets low. Manufacturers can easily eliminate excess inventory from their books, and thus get better return on net assets, simply by not purchasing the inventory until it's needed. Methods of achieving this include 'just in time' (JIT) inventory management, which is also sometimes called the Toyota production system. Figures suggest this could result in a 60 billion saving in plants across Europe.

As a service and commissioning engineer, I've often turned up on site to help a customer with a breakdown, only to find a host of spares out of their antistatic packaging and a confused client, not knowing whether or not the spares were functional.

The best way to prevent that from happening is to correctly test and label working equipment as it goes into the stores. Knowing that the part is ready to go into your application when needed is crucial for both maintenance and production teams. The savings made this way can be significant.

CP Automation now offers a solution to ensure your critical inventory is tested and put back on the shelf ready to go. The Inventory Evaluation Service provided by CP Automation gives the maintenance teams confidence when replacing faulty gear and increasing their ability to investigate equipment failures.

However, no matter how good your inventory management, unnecessary downtime costs coupled with the price of the support engineer's visit, may not be factored in when it comes to actual losses. Engineers must be the first ones to understand how important it is to keep plant downtime to a minimum. Research shows that manufacturers spend 40% of their time on reactive maintenance with little left to get to the root cause of the problem. The irony is that 60% of all preventative maintenance activities are actually unnecessary, so getting



John Mitchell



the right plan in place is a prerequisite.

Another question plant managers need to ask at this stage is whether energy reduction is still a key initiative within their business plan. The majority of enterprises have already implemented the quick wins. Throughout the years we have seen many government schemes meant to support reductions in carbon emissions come and go, from replacing lighting or fixing leaks in air supplies through to fitting energy efficient motors and variable speed drives to pumps and fans. Yet with paybacks becoming harder to achieve in less than two years, many plant managers seem to have put the issue to one side.

Perhaps this needs to be reconsidered. I believe that energy efficiency should remain an integral part of the long term business plan of every engineering company. This is particularly true in light of the crushing changes to the CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme (formerly Carbon Reduction Commitment), which now means large companies will be, almost literally, 'taxed' on their energy use.

For instance dynamic braking resistors are often used in applications where companies could save significant amounts of energy over the years by fitting regeneration units, such as CP Automation's own RevCon, to their variable speed drives.

Despite everything we have discussed, the increased need for budget cuts can put even the best manufacturing efficiency plans under pressure. However, if you place inventory management, energy management and knowledge management at the heart of your strategy, it is possible to both decrease expenditure and improve efficiency. And if every manufacturer did this, the €400bn spent on maintenance activities across Europe could very soon be reduced to a more tolerable figure. □

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