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Case Study

PUNCHING THROUGH COMPLACENCY TO WIN A BID

The right tooling at the right time seals the deal

Sometimes a new business prospect provides a catalyst for change. Sometimes that change makes an entire business more successful. For Anderson Metals, a full-service sheet metal fabrication shop in Greenwood, S.C., both proved to be true.

More than a year ago, Anderson Metals had the opportunity to gain the business of Eaton Electrical, a worldwide supplier of electrical systems. The company was eager to bring in another first-rate customer, adding to a list that already included Volvo, Mack Trucks, John Deere, Carrier, and Caterpillar.

"Eaton is a topnotch company," said Keith Anderson, CEO, president, and founder of Anderson Metals. "We knew that we could help them, and they would be a great partner for us."

Boost in Work Flow Requires More Efficiency

For Anderson Metals, winning the business would mean a considerable increase in work flow. The shop's fabrication processes needed to be more efficient to keep pace. With a 250,000-square-foot facility and a work force of approximately 180, Anderson was confident that it could make it work. But first Anderson

▲ Anderson Metals, Greenwood, S.C., had a chance to win a large job from Eaton Electrical, but it needed new tooling for its turret presses to turn around a weekend job. Fortunately, the company found a tooling source that didn't need weeks for the delivery.

needed to prove itself to Eaton by completing a project with a tight time frame.

Eaton asked Anderson to fabricate thousands of proprietary electrical enclosure components over a weekend. Although it had just four days to deliver, Anderson was optimistic that it could do the job using its turret presses. However, the tooling was problematic. Fabricating the parts required special punch press tooling, including special shapes, forms, and sizes that Anderson Metals didn't have on its shelves. Success would come down to whether their tooling supplier had the special tools in stock—and whether it could deliver them quickly.

Anderson's first call was to its main punch supplier. Unfortunately, it didn't carry in its inventory the special tools Anderson needed for this project. It would take four to six weeks to produce them. If Anderson wanted to win over its newest prospect, it knew it would have to do much better than that.

Backup Plan

Anderson Metals decided to look elsewhere for tooling. Anderson contacted Wilson Tool International®, a punch press tool manufacturer that had recently visited Anderson to present its tooling capabilities.

"The Wilson Tool representative came in and demonstrated their products," noted Plant Manager Darrin Davis. "We decided to give them a call and see if they could help us out."

Wilson Tool did have the special tools in stock. Furthermore, Wilson could get the tools there quickly.

"Wilson Tool had the tooling we needed. They air-freighted it to us that same day," said Davis.

Anderson Metals received the tools and was able to make Eaton Electrical's deadline. That initial success laid the groundwork for a successful partnership between the two companies. Eaton is now one of Anderson's largest customers.

Opportune Time for New Tooling

With new business from Eaton and other customers rolling in, Anderson Metals realized that gaining efficiency while maintaining quality was the key to staying successful. Before Keith Anderson purchased the company three years ago, he said that he noticed a level of complacency about the shop's products and processes. That included punch press tooling.

"But we wanted to challenge all the assumptions about the way we fabricate to become a better shop," Anderson said.

When Anderson employees began using Wilson Tools in their fabricating work for Eaton, they noticed a difference from their previous tooling: It lasted significantly longer between regrinds. Andy Bonnett, a production engineer for Anderson, decided to do a comparison.

"We went from around 30,000 hits between regrinds with our previous tooling to 45,000 with Wilson," reported Bonnett.

The prolonged tool life enables Anderson Metals' press operators to work with fewer downtime interruptions and significantly improve punching productivity. According to Anderson, the tooling plays a pivotal role in its initiative to be more efficient.

Partners in Productivity

Today Anderson Metals' tool inventory includes many Wilson Tool products, including insert blade tools for sheet metal parting applications and multitools for punching flexibility (see **Figure 1**).

▲ **FIGURE 1** **Multitools enable quick loading of punch and die sets, which increases machine uptime by reducing time spent changing and setting tools.**

The tools have the Optima® coating to further extend punch life. And although punching is a straightforward operation, operators have discovered that training is beneficial.

"Our Wilson Tool representative, Jeff Middlebrooks, sent in an engineer to train our press operators how to use the tools," Bonnett said. "That saved us a lot of time."

Anderson Metals is in the process of updating machinery, improving work flow, and speeding turnaround time. The company says it views Wilson Tool as being a major ingredient in those efforts.

"I think our relationship with Wilson is only going to get better. They think the same way we do in terms of productivity, service, and lead-times. We're heading in the right direction," said Keith Anderson. ■

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