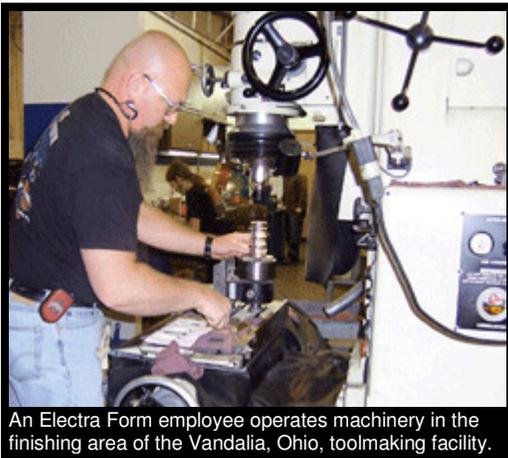


Electra Form draws on 'low-cost' abilities

May 5 2008

By Rhoda Miel
PLASTICS NEWS STAFF



VANDALIA, OHIO (May 5, 11 a.m. EDT) -- As packaging molders looked for ways to make their dollars stretch further, toolmaker Electra Form Industries responded by boosting its own low-cost capabilities.

When packagers wanted to try and use less PET in their bottles, Electra Form fine-tuned its Fast-to-Market prototyping unit to create molds that can produce preforms that are ready for testing within a week.

It also is working with molders to boost production with micro-pitch molds that can squeeze 72 cavities into a space that normally houses 48.

The company's ability to respond to the market demands its customers are facing is paying off. Electra Form has seen a 10 percent growth in business in the past six months alone, and is hiring more toolmakers at its Vandalia facility, even while it expands internationally.

"It's about knowing what the market needs and working with the market and with the customers in partnership," said Brian Karns, vice president and general manager for Vandalia-based Electra Form, part of Wentworth Technologies Co. Ltd. group of companies.

Typically Electra Form's customers are molders focused on small to midsized runs of PET packaging. They generally need tooling that works well on multiple injection presses and are facing more and more pressure to cut costs as well as to come up with solutions to help their customers cut costs — including for PET resin — but still meet strict performance requirements.

Three years ago, parent Wentworth, based in Burlington, Ontario, opened a shop in Rzeszów, Poland, to begin making some parts for Electra Form, to help the mold maker cut production costs. As the need to cut costs grew, the company advanced its training and engineering capabilities in Poland. That move allowed Electra Form to meet North American tooling standards but provide its services at a lower cost, for the European market.

Currently Rzeszów has two full-time tooling engineers on staff, to complement its engineers in Vandalia, Karns said.

At the same time, with the U.S. dollar losing value in exchange rates with European currencies, the company is advertising its "low-cost" capabilities to molders looking for alternatives.

"The majority of our business is in North America, but our growth has been from international customers," Karns said.

To keep pace with production, the company is adding another four to five employees to its night shift in Vandalia. Currently three of its 43 U.S. employees work nights.

With the rising cost of PET, Electra Form customers also are using its Fast-to-Market rapid prototyping capabilities for product development. The company has some machines dedicated solely to FTM production. They can begin making tools within hours and finish them within five to seven days, Karns said.

In addition, dedicated presses can turn out injection molded preforms or complete parts.

“We have a lot of customers who want to know if they can take just a half of a gram out of the PET and need to know how that will affect the performance,” he said.

Keeping itself open to new demands from the market has led Electro Form into opening a sales and repair office in Argentina, where there is a growing call for refurbished PET preform molds, according to Karns.

“Keeping your doors open to new ideas is important,” he said.

“The problem with operating just inside a niche is that, if the niche goes down, you live and die with that niche.”