

worked well and were safe to use.

2. Our organization educated our clients to ensure safe installations.

3. Our organization specialized in product-traceable, high quality and low-volume products.

If these core truths were the foundation of our business, then why were we straying from what we knew how to do? ATM Fly-Ware knew how to build high-quality and low-volume products within the strict policies of a product-traceable risk management system. All we had

to do was figure out a way to build them faster. To increase our production throughput, we had to find a way to eliminate the logjams and make the work flow steadily through the production line. Our experience told us that this was not an easy task, as we had been attempting to improve throughput for years without much success. There was one idea that we hadn't attempted because it seemed too imposing. Inevitably, this was the idea that would satisfy our need for increased throughput and on-time delivery to our clients.

During the last two weeks of December 2000, we shut down the plant and went to work on completely reorganizing our operation from a traditional production line to a cellular production environment. The change involved moving every piece of machinery on the production floor, as well as reconfiguring workstations, offices, paper flow, inventory control areas and materials storage. Months of research, consultant input and planning went into the change management plan prior to implementation. When the time came for implementation, the investment took a full two weeks to complete. When finished, the performance improvements were staggering: We went from an average of 16 days late on deliveries to an average of 4 days early. Our production throughput increased up to 20%, and we were achieving these results with sales lead times cut in half (as seen in Figure 1).

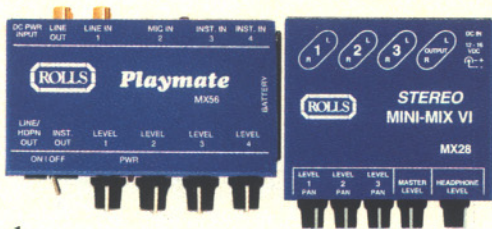
HOW WE RECOVERED

Our traditional production line environment allowed for a linear product flow through the production line. That meant a part would occupy a work center until it was completed, and then it would move forward to the next work center. This works fine when products are similar in design and quantity, however ATM Fly-Ware has to build radically dissimilar parts in quantities that can range from one part to several thousand parts. If a batch of complex parts that required hours to process at the machining center was scheduled in front of a batch of simple parts that only required minutes to process, the net result was that all parts would require hours to actually finish. Additional machinery and operators do not provide greater throughput per man-hour, only a higher volume of delayed production due to scheduling conflicts.

We shifted to a cellular production model, and that has made all the difference. The cellular production environment splits a traditional production line into segments, each handling a particular product type. By splitting one production line into several specialized production lines, called production cells, the logjams are reduced because similar products are being produced within each of the production cells.

PROBLEM SOLVERS

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