



with Ken Wong

Quality Matters

A quality assurance program can make all the difference

While most companies spend the bulk of their time trying to increase throughput and sales, few realize that they must strengthen their ability to consistently produce quality products — on time, all the time. One mistake many manufacturers make is that they perform rework, repair and related services for their customers as a normal part of their business.

In most cases, approximately 50 to 70 percent of service and warranty costs can be prevented. This number is even higher when quality issues can be detected during the manufacturing process. Without the proper systems in place to ensure the quality of product throughout the process, eventually the cost of fixing problems begins to increase and often “snowballs” out of control.

Unfortunately when faced with this situation, many manufacturers maintain the status quo: they follow the regular production schedule, take new orders and just deal with the interruptive rework and service. But eventually quality issues build up and hamper the manufacturer’s ability to provide adequate customer service and finish regular orders on time, let alone take new ones.

One manufacturer who realized the importance of quality is cabinetry manufacturer, AyA Kitchens and Baths. Founded in 2000, AyA currently employs 260 people in an 180,000 square foot state-of-the-art manufacturing facility in Mississauga, Ont.

During a phase of rapid growth and success, the management team began to notice an increase in internal rework, back orders and service calls. These issues began to affect AyA’s ability to provide the consistent service that their customers had come to expect.

Realizing that this could lead to greater problems in the future, AyA management took a proactive approach: they stopped taking new orders for certain products and became much more selective about their customer base. The team’s rationale was that if they couldn’t produce their product on time and to the quality level that had been set, then they couldn’t provide the customer with the service they deserved.

After making this bold decision, AyA implemented the WoodMark quality program (wpqc.com), which is designed to help companies identify, resolve and control quality issues. AyA used the program to focus on the development of procedures and standards, training and data collection and analyses of the process. A quality champion was appointed and teams assembled to work on day-to-day quality issues. A management committee was created to steer the program implementation. The most significant improvements came via the in-plant quality team composed of individuals from different machine centres throughout the manufacturing process. Their contributions led to a significant decrease in rework on the plant floor.

As a result of the program, a visible quality culture has emerged and a high standard established throughout the organization. This has considerably helped with employee buy-in. Focusing on reduction of rework and back order in the AyA plant has quickly resulted in fewer service and warranty claims at the customer end. AyA has lowered their rework by 50 percent in a seven-month time frame, and has gone from hundreds of back orders per month to literally weeks where there are none. This has allowed the company to improve on time delivery rates and put them in a strong position to confidently take on new orders while consistently being able to maintain the high standard they have set across the organization. Most importantly, they are now able to identify root causes of quality problems quickly. ■

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