



## **New Berlin Plastics, Breaking the mold**

*Manufacturing in Action, Source : The Manufacturer US*

**Custom injection molding company New Berlin Plastics focuses on continuous improvement and a new ERP system to improve productivity and efficiency. Linda Seid Frembes finds out more**

Back in 1975, New Berlin Plastics (NBP) started out as a small hobby shop. Fast forward 30 years and the company has grown into a custom injection molder of precision components for the medical, water treatment, transportation, and consumer markets specializing in the manufacture and value-added assembly of products using engineering grade thermoplastic resins. The company focuses its efforts on complex, close tolerance molding applications and provides technical and engineering assistance to customers' new product development efforts.



Based in New Berlin, WI, the company relocated to a 100,000-square-foot, build-to-suit facility in 1998 that was designed for injection molding systems and gave them the ability to expand. NBP was purchased in 2001 by Mark Siewert, NBP's current vice president and COO and his business partner, Jeff Held, NBP's current president and CEO. "We focus on engineering grade resins and use very few commodity grade materials," explains Siewert. "We are not a 'shoot and ship' injection molding company. We are tied to key customers by supporting them with value-added activities like complete assembly, testing, and inventory management."

NBP's focus is on speed, accuracy, and quality. In addition to Siewert, key players at NBP include Mike Tippery, director of manufacturing, Joy Rogala, director of finance; Mark Brandstaetter, director of marketing; and Nanda Kottury, director of quality and continuous improvement.

The new ownership brought with it a focus of continuous improvement and teamwork. The company incorporated cellular manufacturing several years ago as a means to better control manufacturing activity. "Cell number one is dedicated to small high precision components with very tight tolerances," says Siewert. "In another cell we mold, assemble and package paper dispensing equipment that ships directly to our customer's customer."

NBP also implemented just-in-time manufacturing a few years ago to lower inventory levels. Kanbans were implemented with a large customer who currently does two pickups a day at the New Berlin plant. "We don't carry a lot of work in process or finished goods," says Siewert. "In order to meet customer demand we need to respond immediately. That requires scheduling flexibility, quick job changeover, and a close relationship with our vendors. Manufacturing at NBP is a very fast paced, dynamic environment."

The company is currently in the process of implementing lean manufacturing as part of its continuous improvement efforts. Current activities include plant-wide 5S projects that are 90 percent complete, implementation of office 5S, as well as a value stream mapping project on new product development.

As part of continued improvements, NBP invested in an ERP platform specifically created for the plastics industry called the IQMS EnterpriseIQ system that went live on January 1, 2005. IQMS runs on a Windows-based OS and goes one step beyond traditional ERP platforms by providing real-time information on press activity, scheduling, scrap rates, down time, and the status of all orders in production.

Based on its efforts, NBP has seen revenues grow by 35 percent, and productivity increase by 50 percent during the past four years. Looking ahead, the company will continue to focus on efficiency and productivity improvement and improving its systems. As a next step, NBP is looking to invest more in automation and increased deployment of robots on the production floor. The company is evaluating and researching how to best utilize six-axis robots which can replace operator labor, are easily programmable, and can be moved from one workstation to another as demand changes. Siewert views this as yet another labor-saving and quality improvement opportunity for NBP.

“We will continue to take on value-added activities and improve upon our processes for those,” he concludes. “With the improvements we have put in place, we can take a project and quote realistic completion dates and be price-competitive. We can seamlessly take on more work without disrupting current operations.”