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## E&D Lights Up Plastic Fabricating

**Dallas, TX-based E&D Plastics custom manufactures products for architectural/decorator, medical/veterinary, restaurant and retail applications.**

**By Karen M. Koenig**

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If, as the old adage goes, variety is the spice of life, then Dallas-based E&D Plastics is having a great "season."

"My test of how we're doing is to have four or five different things going on at once," says Lynn Littlejohn, vice president and general manager of E&D Plastics. "The mix of product creates a good flow. It also keeps people sharp."

The phrase "mix of product" is no understatement. The company fabricates products for a wide variety of industries including: architectural/decorator, hospital/medical, veterinary, restaurant and food service, and trade show and retail industries. Products include: light fixtures, storage bins, showroom displays, polycarbonate incubator inner walls, polycarbonate monitor stands for CAT scanners, anesthesia chambers for small animals, POP displays, cut shapes for photo mounting and battery covers.

"Approximately 90 percent of what we do is custom," Littlejohn says. "We've never printed a catalog because we want to stay custom. We don't want to be known as a warehouse."

"One of the benefits of being custom is that when one sector of the economy goes south, we can pick up business in another," he adds. "We haven't had any downtime in 10 years and, since 1984, we've had 10 to 15 percent growth every year," Littlejohn says.

"I think a lot of it has to do with the 'bad' habit of not saying 'no' to anyone."

Of the custom work produced, 50-60 percent of that is a combination of POP displays and slatwall. Medical products, including test tube holders and occluded artery displays, comprise 10-15 percent of the company's business and fixtures currently account for 20-25 percent.

"We have a \$50 minimum on custom orders. Most of the customers have a pretty good idea of what they want. Otherwise we'll steer them in the right direction, both in design and material," Littlejohn says. The company uses AutoCAD and BobCAD

software which can be downloaded directly to the CNC routers.

## Manufacturing the products

Machinists at E&D's 10,000-square-foot plant typically begin with 4-foot by 8-foot sheets of plastic material, which they cut to specification on one of the company's three saws, including an automatic Powermatic.

Next, the part is sent to one of three CNC routers. The company recently invested in a two-head Standard Router CNC router which it uses in conjunction with its two older model Thermwood Cartesian CNC routers. Onsrud Cutter solid carbide single flute up spiral bits are typically used in the cutting procedure. "Solid carbide works well and gives a good finish," Littlejohn explains. Seco dust collectors help keep the air dust free.

From the routers, parts progress to one of three small formers designed and built by E&D Plastics. "We found it works better to rout first and then form," Littlejohn adds.

In the case of the polycarbonate donation boxes which E&D Plastics manufactured for a local charity, the company used strip heating and drape forming to make the shell. "Ninety percent of our heating is strip heating. Also, 90 percent of our parts are bent versus (straight pieces) glued." Littlejohn says.

Five Calrod tubular bar heaters are used to create bends for products such as spinners, racks and casket stands. The company also has four bar nichrome wire heaters which are pedal activated. E&D has the capability to perform multiple strip heating operations up to 8 feet long.

Although the company has two dedicated quality control engineers, each of the employees "does his own quality control checks," Littlejohn adds. After machining, finishing plays an important role in all products. In addition to using hand sanders for wet sanding, the company also utilizes a Timesavers widebelt sander with a 36-inch belt. One of the applications in which the Timesavers was used was to polish plastic security panels.

## Say Cheese

It turned out to be picture perfect opportunity for Lynn Littlejohn and his family when they purchased the then six-year-old E&D Plastics back in 1980.

Since its inception in 1974, the company has enjoyed a steady growth rate, 10 to 15 percent annually since 1984. Littlejohn attributes much of that success to the company's goal of manufacturing products for the custom market.

Among the custom products manufactured in hard plastics, the company has also enjoyed success manufacturing PVC foam displays, picture backings and mechanical parts and components.

"It's so easy to cut, it's lightweight and can look like wood, metal or plastic," says Littlejohn. "The best look is achieved by

Other finishing operations include: edge polishing on an Edge Finisher, bevelling, radiusing, bonding, solvent welding, hand lamination of overlays to various substrates, and silk screening of designs. The company uses a high resolution scanner and laser printer to create images used in its silk screening process. The majority of silk screening and graphics is handled by Mark Littlejohn, Lynn's brother.

## Plastic stock

E&D Plastics typically works with stock in sheet, rod and tube forms.

cutting the terial with solid carbide cutting tools."

Another use for the material is E&D's patent-pending sandbagging machine which consists of a square frame with holes and PVC pipe for filling sandbags. Targeted markets for this new products include FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

— Karen Koenig

&mdash; its only stock production item &mdash; which it sells regionally through the internet and literature sheets.

The company maintains a small inventory &mdash; approximately 200 sheets &mdash; of acrylic, PVC and polycarbonate. "Anything else we can order," he adds.

"Else" includes UHMWPE, which the company has used to machine wear guides to make tracks for cabinet doors. Other specialized products produced by E&D Plastics include polycarbonate neonatal incubators.

"The manufacturers originally went with acrylic, but they had problems with breakage because the units were handled and cleaned every day. We came up with a polycarbonate version as an alternative &mdash; and it probably killed us. Now, they only have to buy one because they don't need to replace them anymore," he jokes.

Since then, the company has also built several transportable incubators out of polycarbonate. In addition to machining the plastic, E&D Plastics also did the hardware and assembly on the machines. "Customers want that kind of service," he says. Based on the company's sales growth and increased number of clients, he adds, their dedication to service has paid off.

E&D Plastics' customer list reads like a who's who of industrial giants. They include: Texas Instruments, U.S. Sprint, United Parcel Service, Chuck E. Cheese restaurants, Krogers grocery chain, Neiman Marcus, County Seat, Guess Jeans, Sound Warehouse, Blockbuster, Mattel Toy Co., and Best Buy. The company has also done work for: the Texas Lottery, Dallas Museum of Art, the Dallas Museum of Natural History, Dallas Photo Labs and Freeman Exhibit Co.

"We don't need to advertise per se. Being customer oriented, we get most of our business through word of mouth and referrals from distributors and other customers," Littlejohn adds.

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