

MassMEP Delivers a Great Package Deal to Accutech

Foxboro Packaging Manufacturer Learns Lean Techniques, Decreases Lead Times, Increases Fill Times, and Eliminates All Waste on Shop Floor

Accutech Packaging manufactures custom designed thermoformed plastic packaging that hold products like razors, cosmetics, electronics, and medical diagnostic kits. In their Paper Converting area the company also produces specialty paper mailers, product displays and provides contract packaging services. With the desire to grow the business and remain competitive, Co-owner and Vice President Patrick Madigan knew Accutech was ready to implement Lean.

“We had been working to incorporate some Lean practices and concepts into Accutech’s HR and Quality manuals, but we knew we needed to take it much further,” said Madigan. “The mind set was here but we needed to change our culture and that can be a difficult process. The entire company needs to be involved in Lean to share a culture where everyone is trying to do what they do better and as a team,” he added.

Over the years, Madigan had done a lot of reading and research on Lean and Continuous Improvement and had participated in several of Massachusetts Manufacturing Extension Partnership’s (MassMEP) Lean Roundtables and public events, where he heard first-hand how Lean was working at other companies. He decided that getting some outside help could give him the traction he needed to transform Accutech into a Lean enterprise. MassMEP’s Jim Gusha assisted Madigan in submitting a grant application to help fund Accutech’s training and MassMEP’s Lead Project Manager Rick Bowie worked with them on their actual Lean deployment.

“All of Accutech’s employees participated in Basic Lean Training, engaged in problem solving exercises and 5s methods for organizing the workplace. Through various Kaizen events, employee teams studied processes, took them apart, and rearranged them for better flow and to reduce excess travel on the shop floor,” said Bowie. “We introduced Value Stream Mapping exercises, mapping out the current processes and identifying areas of waste. The trained team members then carried these methods into other areas in the factory as well.”

Accutech’s workforce soon learned that standardization was the key to increasing capacity. For example, a credit card company had an important packaging line job which required Accutech to produce 600 thousand booklets for their product. The manufacturer would be required to produce five thousand pieces per week all year long. During Kaizens on that particular line, employees realized they all had different methods and abilities when it came to assembling these booklets. They came up with a solution: those who were most adept at the folding and taping trained others to do it the same way, which standardized the procedure. Productivity increased immediately, the clients requirements were met, and now they have additional capacity to handle future challenges.

“Employees see now that better and faster is not a threat to their jobs. It simply allows us to handle more work with the people we already have,” added Madigan. “By standardizing procedures in the design and tooling areas we saw a 20 percent decrease in thermoform tooling lead times, and a 25 percent increase in capacity utilizing the same number of employees.”

Accutech has also found a way to add value for their customer by providing filled point of sale packaging for a screw manufacturer. This has increased their profitability by more than 20 percent. Lean techniques have resulted in increased fill speeds and workers on the shop floor are able to see equal or greater output with less effort. The team reduced production time by almost 20 percent, and through their own continuous improvement efforts, they have been able to produce an additional 500 pieces per day. Now employees feel comfortable making suggestions for improvement and do so openly.

“I tell everyone I meet about the MassMEP and the value they have brought to Accutech,” said Madigan.

“If anyone is not doing Lean, I believe they will cease to exist within five years. People are looking for maximum value at the lowest cost. If you are not focused on providing great value at low cost, you won't be able to succeed.”