



September, 2009 - Small Steps, Big Results

ProBusS Presents

News about skilled trades, maintenance, and manufacturing

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Welcome back

Fall usually means cooler weather but it's been unseasonably warm the last couple of weeks. Business activity seems to be heating up, too. We're getting more requests for quotes, and there's more work in the pipeline. Let's hope it's a sign of a strong year ahead for all of us.

Tackling the elephant

Managing maintenance and repair for a manufacturing plant can be overwhelming sometimes. With a tall stack of maintenance tickets, staff stretched to the max, and everything an apparent priority, there's too much to do and not enough time or resources to get it all done.

The solution? Well, as a saying goes, you eat an elephant one bite at a time. Tackle things in manageable bites: quick repairs, simple changes, and short term improvements that help you get on top of the situation. Here are a few examples of how to tackle that maintenance elephant...



Find "hidden" space

Many companies are reconfiguring their manufacturing space, changing machine layouts, and looking for other ways to **reduce the plant footprint**. Recently we dismantled and removed some 60-foot-high silos for storing plastic resins in a client's plant. It wasn't a big job, but it made a big difference in their available space.

We've helped clients reorganize entire plants and small parts departments, and created new space by reconfiguring racks. We've also cleaned out entire production plants. For a client in Kalamazoo last month, we removed utility lines from a plant so they could remove machines and hook-ups all at once. You name it, we've removed it, repaired it, or reinstalled it:

- electrical conduit and wiring
- service panels
- air and water lines
- piping
- guard rails, cages, and storage systems

Sure, we can create a completely new process-driven plant layout for your new or existing plant. But if you want to take smaller steps, **think about simple things like racking**: reorganizing racks and repairing racking parts to create more storage space from your current square footage and equipment. Or **remove unused equipment to create more usable production space**. Found space is like finding money you didn't know you had.



Gear up

Replacing seals and bearings has been a frequent job in recent weeks. Simple, quick, and critical to keeping production running smoothly.

Recently a customer had a precision height adjustable table (used to test electronic altimeters) that wasn't working properly, and asked us to have a look. The 20-year-old gear box was the problem. Replacement parts were available, but it was more cost-effective to buy a new gear box than to replace individual gears. So now the customer has an entirely new gear box, a one-year warranty, and one less thing to worry about.



We're huge proponents of preventative maintenance and extending the life of current equipment. But sometimes it pays to not only go new, but also **expand the scope of the repair to reduce cost and prevent another repair job** before long.

Build -or rebuild- just what you need

Last month in the shop we fabricated barriers and hand rails to protect workers while stacking gondolas. Two-inch-square steel tubing, with vertical struts standing 25 feet from floor to ceiling, at five-foot intervals.

In that case it was all-new material, but repairing and re-sizing existing guard rails can be cost-effective, too. More companies prefer to **re-use materials** these days, and sometimes **a little custom fabrication** is all it takes to prevent working equipment from becoming scrap metal.

Start small, move up



We all like to dig in to big jobs, but the resources are not always available. So take things a step at a time. **Start small.** Focus on machines or departments that need attention. Create some new space by reconfiguring equipment. For a nuisance line that always seems to need more than its share of attention, set up a focused PM program for it. **Take the pressure off your maintenance staff** by bringing in an outside skilled trades specialist to make key repairs or fabricate needed parts.

ProBusS can help you eat that elephant of a stack of maintenance tickets.

And, if it's what you need, we don't mind "cleaning up after the elephant," either.

New company moves ahead

As we mentioned in our last ProBusS Presents, Jim Watrous is heading up a new company, Green Mountain Recycling, an industrial plastics recycling and remanufacturing company. When operational, Green Mountain (GMR) will convert post-industrial PE and PP waste into high quality, low cost, regrind plastics for the injection molding, extruding, and compounding industries.

ProBusS is conducting the search for GMR's manufacturing site in West Michigan, and will design the plant layout, and order and install all equipment. **Site selection and equipment ordering are expected in October.** Close on the heels of those events, GMR will begin contracting with post-industrial plastic waste suppliers.