

Timberworx slash lead time from 8 weeks to 10 days

timber**WORX**

Struggling to meet customer demands for delivery and quality, Timberworx used Lean Consortium to engage their staff and transform their company from an ailing concern to an exemplar.

A manufacturing division of REL Acoustics Ltd, Timberworx is the UK's largest manufacturer of premium quality acoustic cabinets and enclosures for the audio industry, supplying worldwide markets. A few months ago Ian Finkill, the new MD, realised he needed to take a revolutionary approach if the company was ever going to perform how it needed to. "The business was on its knees and needed pulling out of the dark ages. We recognised the need to change the culture and bring out the true potential of this niche business. We needed to embrace the change necessary to modernise our approach, empower our people and embed Lean into the culture of the business"

With only a 40% on time delivery performance, an eight week lead time, quality issues and a skilled workforce whose morale was ebbing away rapidly, Ian drew on a contact from the past for assistance. "I'd been through the Lean Consortium programme a few years back at another company, so I know it could deliver what Timberworx needed." said Ian. He contacted Andrew Nicholson, one of the Lean Consortium principals, and found the programme had been expanded and improved in the intervening period. Within weeks, the company was signed up.



A REL Reference Series sub-bass unit fully assembled.

Ian chose to introduce the staff to the programme with Andrew's assistance, at a shopfloor meeting one afternoon. "I was blunt with them," he recalls, "I owed it to them to be honest, and I told them that without their help we couldn't succeed." The response was overwhelmingly positive, especially

after a visit to a past participant where staff saw first hand what could be achieved. Lean Leaders were quickly appointed and were straining at the leash to get moving. Early in the programme, training was provided to them which showed them how to analyse what they were doing, identify the wastes involved, and what to do about them. In addition they learned a key principal which guided their thinking from then on- pull production. Until then the shopfloor had been crowded with work in progress- Tim Sykes, production

controller recalls, "when a job card turned up, I just cut board for it- I didn't even bother if it wasn't needed for weeks, it just got cut and stacked. Now we only cut what we need, when we need it. It's easier to control, our stock is down, and the factory is clear. Work goes through faster." 'Faster' is an understatement- the combined effects of the improvements -implementing pull production and single piece flow, reviewing the layout of key operations, how information is provided to the

Many orders are now fulfilled in a week, and delivery performance is 100%

shopfloor, and how individual work areas are organised- has resulted in the lead time for products dropping from over eight weeks to ten days or less. Many orders are filled in a week, and rework, both internal and external, has been all but eliminated.

In addition, the factory is now clean, tidy and a nice place to work in- something that was important to Ian. "I wanted to give the guys a decent working environment- why should they work in a pigsty? Because they have been involved in making the changes and building the new areas, they really own them, and keeping them nice isn't an issue- they just take care of it."

The benefits don't stop there of course- as well as the staff and the customers, the company has benefitted significantly. Further elements of the overall group operation are being transferred to Sheffield from the REL offices in Wales, and they are now poised to capture new business and



Multi-head cabinet routing

diversify into new markets. Their new capabilities provide an opportunity that companies new to using 'lean' often overlook– not just cutting costs and times, but adding value to their products in different ways. Timberworx customers used to order in batches of up to 200, irregularly, but generally wanted in a hurry. When the reasons for this were investigated it was simply that delivery performance was so erratic that customers just wanted the assurance of the product being on their premises. Now the company can easily accommodate weekly shipments of smaller quantities and short notice specials, with all the benefits of less stock, reduced storage space, less chance of damage and better flexibility which that brings to the customers, and for which they will pay a premium.

Ian Finkill sums up progress, and the way forward: "It was very important that the management team got behind the people to ensure that momentum wasn't lost. The transformation is unbelievable and we now have a focused ambitious workforce who continue to make realistic,

The improvements summarised
Lead times reduced from an average 8 weeks to 10 days
WIP reduced by 30%
100% on-time delivery now consistently achieved
A transformation in culture and staff moral
Visual management boards established throughout to share information and manage processes
Implementation of cross-functional training
Promoted a "can-do" attitude, challenging old practices
Significantly reduced the number of defects and returns

sustainable improvements in every day operations"

Perhaps the last words should be left to the staff– the Lean Sponsors and Leaders who took part so enthusiastically and who, with the lean teams, generated most of the improvement ideas. They are an outstanding group, and rose to Ian's challenge admirably.

Lee Green – Operations Manager / Lean Sponsor: "Having worked in this

company from the early days it was hard to see what improvements and changes could be made, however we knew deep inside that change was desperately needed. Thanks to Ian who guided us towards lean manufacturing and the services of Lean Consortium, we have not looked back since. From our very first lean meeting our eyes were opened to the tools and methods we could use to turn our company into an ambitious world class organisation. The past seven months of our lean journey have influenced everyone that works in this company and has now become the platform for moving the company forward."

Paul Sanderson – CNC Team Leader / Lean Leader: "Being a Lean Leader for seven

months has opened my eyes as to what can be achieved with better communication and teamwork, enabling the workforce to be more pro-active has greatly improved our output and helped create a brilliant working environment."

Andy Nortcliffe – Factory Team Leader / Lean Leader: "I have been employed at

Timberworx for the past 6 years as a bench hand assembler and 12 months ago was promoted to Factory Team Leader. I was well aware of the need for change, but was never able to instigate it. After the appointment of Ian Finkill, the subsequent promotion of Lee Green and our involvement with the Lean Consortium, I feel empowered to make changes and more equipped to sustain them."

The Timberworx lean leaders & sponsors



From left, Paul, Andy, Tim, Lee and Ian

"The transformation is unbelievable" Ian Finkill, General Manager, Timberworx.

If you want to know more about transforming your business and improving your competitiveness, visit www.leanconsortium.co.uk or call 07957 336856 to book a no-obligation visit and discussion about your specific issues.

