



Press News

HOMAG helps Little Dreams create an advanced manufacturing facility

Stoke-on-Trent based Little Dreams has been manufacturing contract furniture for almost 30 years. Originally focused on the toy industry, the company diversified into educational furniture early on. Because of the high quality and precision of the components it produced, it was a small step from there to becoming a supplier to a wide range of market sectors.

“Our production flexibility has been the key,” explains Andrew Leake, managing director at Little Dreams. He continues, “This has enabled us to successfully design and manufacture products for schools, colleges, universities, hotels, retail outlets, public sector buildings, healthcare institutions, catalogue companies and one-off bespoke projects as well as offering a CNC machining service for component manufacture.

“In 2010, our management team sat down to write a five year plan. The big dream was to create a production facility more in line with the best of continental thinking. We wanted to be able to handle everything from one-off bespoke items to manufacturing hundreds and hundreds of a specific component.”

Investing in the best solutions

“We have been using CNC technology since day one, but we wanted to invest in the very latest technology available to help us achieve our aim. Naturally, we talked to a number of potential equipment manufacturers to see who could supply us with the machinery and systems we were looking for.

“In the end, it was a relatively easy decision; we decided to partner with HOMAG for several reasons. Firstly, as global market leaders, their kit is the benchmark for the industry and they can supply almost any piece of equipment needed for a first class production facility.

“Secondly, we wanted one piece of software to drive the entire factory and HOMAG’s eSOLUTION woodCAD | CAM does just that, it is a fabulous piece of software. Finally, HOMAG UK is a truly professional operation and its people are really good to deal with. You can trust what they say; they won’t try and sell you something you don’t need, they understand your business and make recommendations you can trust.”

The start of something big

“The first machine we bought from HOMAG UK was the WEEKE BHX 050 vertical CNC drilling machine. We needed this for a particular job and it proved to be a great piece of kit. Since then we have purchased a host of machines from them including the WEEKE Vantage 43M which we ordered to replace the last of our fixed bed machines.

“The investment, however, that has made possibly the biggest impact on our business is in the HOMAG Automation TLF 210 storage and retrieval system coupled to the HOLZMA HPP 300 beam saw. This set-up was central to our five year plan and is something that had been on our ‘want’ list for a long time. Our business uses around 150 different types of sheet materials in a year, some of which we will only require one sheet. Stock keeping for these items was a nightmare and we never really knew exactly what we had available at any one time.

“All that has changed with the storage system. Not only do we now know exactly what stock we’ve got, but also we know precisely where it is. More importantly, perhaps, the storage system has increased the through put on the saw by over 50% because it delivers exactly the right board at precisely the right time. This means that the throughput of the saw is determined by the storage system rather than the saw operator, so it is much more reliable and efficient.”

Coping with production fluctuations

“Another significant investment was the HOMAG Ambition 2264 edgebander with the ZHR 05 return system. We wanted to upgrade our previous machine to enable us to use PU glue and thicker edge materials so we visited the HOMAG UK showroom in Castle Donington to see what they could offer.

“We were looking for a machine that would give us plenty of capacity. Our production is never constant; sometimes we are running small jobs through the edgebander and then all of a sudden we need to ramp up production to cope with a big order that comes through.

“The Ambition 2264 gives us this capacity with no loss of quality and the return system we specified means it can be run easily by one operator which is a big money saver.”

The shape of things to come

“The nature of our business also means we have a lot of shaped pieces to edge and although we have a BRANDT KTD 720 that handles the small radius work, we needed a machine that would be able to cope with the large volumes of shaped worktops that we produce.

“As usual, the HOMAG UK area manager, Jon Lawman, was really helpful and suggested we invest in a HOMAG Venture 320 L. This CNC machine is great for cutting and edging shaped parts and enables us to get a lot more work through quickly.”

Controlling our destiny

“The investment we have made over the last five years has been substantial, but it has totally changed our business. Our USP (unique selling proposition) is that we can handle anything, easily, quickly and cost effectively.

“The key to this has to be the eSOLUTION software which enables us to control all the machines. It really is a fabulous piece of software. In our 30 years, nothing has ever come close to this powerful tool.

“Ultimately, once we do layouts and 3D visuals for customers and they give us approval to manufacture, we will be able to just click a button and send the job to the machines. Previously, we would have had three or four days’ work to get everything ready, but it will be instant and that is vitally important to us. Every year, lead times get shorter and shorter; it’s a major problem for manufacturers and so everything we do is geared to meet this demand.”

It's like having another salesman on the road

"All this new equipment has given us our dream factory, but it has delivered far more than just great products at competitive prices. When we invite customers or potential customers in to the facility they are blown away by what they see, particularly with the HOMAG Automation storage and retrieval system linked to the HOLZMA saw. They have seen nothing like it and the confidence factor it communicates is like having another salesman on the road.

"Naturally, a project like this takes time and money to complete, but when we have needed it, HOMAG Finance has been ready to help, putting together sensible finance packages that suit our specific requirements. They have always given us a fair deal and it has enabled us to bring forward investment in machinery.

"All in all, I have not got a bad word to say about HOMAG UK, they have always done us proud and I know I can trust them to do the best for our company," concludes Andrew Leake.

If you would like more information or a demonstration of any HOMAG machinery or software, please contact Adele Hunt at HOMAG UK on 01332 856424.

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