



Press News

HOMAG partnership turns dreams into reality for A1 Fitted Kitchens

It was back in 2004 when Alan Beckwith, founder of Kent based A1 Fitted Kitchens, set out his dream to build his company into a leading supplier of quality kitchens to builders, developers and architects. Up until then, his business focused on kitchen installations using bought-in products.

“It became clear to me that if we wanted to grow the business we needed to start designing and manufacturing our own kitchen furniture,” explains Alan Beckwith. He continues, “From the outset, we wanted to build the business on the values of quality and service, and hence the Beckwith Interiors brand was born.

“Bearing in mind the foundational values, the plan was to invest in the best machinery we could afford. This goal led us to the doors of HOMAG UK where we met Charles Smith, the area sales manager for our neck of the woods. From the outset, we always felt very relaxed talking with Charles and the HOMAG UK team. At no point did we ever feel pressured. It seemed that rather than wanting to sell us something, they wanted to understand our business and come up with a solution that would take into account our future growth plans.”

From small beginnings...

“The first equipment we invested in was a BRANDT KD 53 edgebander, a machine which continues to serve us well today. This was followed by a WEEKE Optimat BP 80 pod and rail CNC machine. This equipment enabled us to steadily grow the business. By 2013 however, we had gone as far as we could with the BP 80 and hence the decision to invest in a new CNC machine.

“As a matter of course, we looked into what was on offer in the market place, but it soon became clear that there was only one brand that was going to give us the flexibility and future-proofing we were looking for, and that was WEEKE.

“Following in-depth discussions with Charles and the HOMAG UK team it was recommended that we opt for the WEEKE Vantage 100 CNC nesting machine. This would allow us to put on a full size board, cut all the parts out of that board, including shaped parts, and process them in one pass.

“Previously, we had to cut the boards before they went on the BP 80 CNC and then process the parts individually. So there was no question, of course, that this new nesting CNC would save us a considerable amount of time.”

Totally integrated into the manufacturing process

“The Vantage 100 CNC is a very impressive machine in its own right. It has a traverse speed of 96m/min, a powerful main spindle for fast routing, a tool changer and a vertical drill block, so that all the components can be fully machined (except horizontal drilling which is done on our WEEKE ABD 050). The more we looked into our production route, however, we realised we had to look at the processes down the line for us to get the maximum out of Vantage 100.

“To achieve this, we had to integrate the Vantage 100 into our manufacturing process so that it was a seamless part of the production line. We had to think about how we were going to get the cut parts off the CNC’s bed and deliver them to the next process.

“That’s when we decided to add a conveyor belt to the out-feed bed of the Vantage 100. So now, when work pieces come off the CNC, they are vacuumed and pushed off onto the conveyor belt which takes them to a label printer.

“The label printer affixes a barcoded label to each part so that when they arrive at the next process, we don’t have to locate the positioning or drilling pattern of each part.

“The WEEKE ABD 050 reads the barcode and knows exactly the number and position of holes to drill on each piece. It is a great little bit of kit. It drills holes, squirts in glue and inserts the dowels automatically which saves so much time. This done, the parts are then ready to go onto the edgebander.”

Software is the key

“This whole process has totally transformed what we do. Turn-around time, accuracy and quality rose to a whole new level. There were still areas, however, where we thought we could improve. We still had to put each job into woodWOP 6 which was time consuming. Our goal was to link the whole thing together to work from the front-end right down to the back-end.

“Having discussed the issue with HOMAG, we decided to opt for the woodCAD | CAM software package. This is the heart of the whole system and has changed the way we operate. Everything is now done at the front end; we no longer have to programme at each machine, it’s all done with the woodCAD | CAM software.

“Even if there’s a change at the very last minute, we can make that change and it doesn’t disrupt production. We can stop the operation mid-flow and slot-in something, perhaps a part that’s been damaged from a previous order that needs replacing, and then continue with the original jobs, it’s that easy.

“So the software really is the key to maximising this set-up and it is worth every penny we’ve invested. To get the best out of the software we’ve had five days training up at Castle Donington and that too has been worth its weight in gold. It is also great to know that we have the backup of the technical team to call on whenever we need advice. I’ve always taken the approach that, like most things in life, software requires effort; if you put in the effort, the potential rewards are tremendous. It is a very, very valuable tool.”

Virtual production

“The new set-up has enabled us to take on bigger, more complex and intricate jobs, but of course, these larger projects come with their own set of challenges. Before we had the software we couldn’t have contemplated accepting such complicated bespoke jobs.

“With the woodCAD | CAM software we can ‘virtually’ produce the jobs on screen which allows us to check that all the sizes of intricate pieces fit together properly without having to cut a single board.

“We had a big job recently which when we tried to ‘virtually assemble’ the job it didn’t work because the customer had made errors on some of their measurements. In this instance, we were able to correct the errors with no production costs or time lost; previously we wouldn’t have discovered the mistake until we came to assemble the real job, by which time it would have cost us considerable time, materials and money.”

Help from HOMAG Finance

“Naturally, committing to all this equipment and software was no small outlay for a company like ours, but HOMAG Finance was really helpful. They demonstrated a real understanding of our business and our particular financial needs.

“They put together a sensible solution which enabled us to conclude the deal confident in the knowledge that we could afford the financial commitment and would be clear within five years. It was a very helpful, open and candid process.

“With this new manufacturing cell we are very confident about future growth. HOMAG UK has given us the peace of mind to forge ahead with our plans; we haven’t had to over-invest up front as the system will grow with us as our business develops. All in all, we know that the project has been right from design stage through to delivery,” concludes Alan Beckwith.

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

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