



Casestudy

Holbrook Timber Frame Increases Productivity with Weinmann

With the business growing in an uncertain marketplace, Welsh timber frame specialists, Holbrook wanted to increase output per square metre and gain more production flexibility in their Bridgend facility. To achieve this they decided to invest in a Weinmann frame station with a multi-function bridge.

Holbrook's director, Neil Smith, takes up the story, "Since launching the company in 2003 business growth had been good. As a consequence, we felt there was an opportunity to take the company to the next level and automation of certain production tasks was an important element of the strategy to achieve this. There was, however, an added complication. Storm clouds were gathering over the economic situation and this made any decisions on how to approach the expansion even more critical than normal.

"The most obvious area to improve productivity was in the construction of the timber frames themselves. These were fabricated manually on benches in the factory and were therefore labour intensive. This being so, it was difficult to adjust for extreme production demands, both high and low.

"We needed a framing station that would automate a significant part of the production process, both in terms of the make up of the frame and its cladding. The problem was that machines which could do this required a footprint three to four times the size of our facility – until, that was, we learnt about the Weinmann WEK 120.

"This compact frame station with a multi-function bridge takes up a floor space less than 5m x 15m, even with the wide panel option we specified. The machine fits perfectly into our factory and gives us the increased output and flexibility we require.

"To satisfy ourselves that this was the right machine for our operation, we went over to Stuttgart in Germany to see the machine in operation. This was really useful and gave us the confidence that the investment would pay dividends for our business in the years to come.



“There is no doubt that I would recommend this frame station to any manufacturer looking to improve output and flexibility.”

Neil Smith
Director
Holbrook Timber Frame Ltd



Constructing the frame on the Weinmann WEK 120

Operator fixes a noggin on the frame

The nailing head on the multifunction bridge

Completed frames ready for transit

“Once up and running the machine improved our productivity almost overnight; we can now do with six men what previously required twelve.”

Neil Smith
Director
Holbrook Timber Frame Ltd

Improving Productivity

“The equipment was delivered and installed in a timely fashion, although as you would expect, there were some initial snagging issues which had to be sorted. Once up and running the machine improved our productivity almost overnight; we can now do with six men what previously required twelve. This has allowed us to re-deploy staff for the manufacture of roof trusses, Ecojoist and Spandrel Panels.

“During the installation process the engineer from Weinmann trained our staff on the operation of the machine. Both the WEK 120 and the software to run it are easy to operate and that has helped make for a smooth transition. This has been aided further by the fact that the Weinmann software links with the Eleco timber frame software we use.

“Whilst the machine has definitely had a positive effect on our bottom line, it is early days to put a value on this. One clear benefit though has been the flexibility it has given us to cope with the somewhat unpredictable and excessive swings in demand over the last two years. Under such circumstances manual production of the frames would have given us serious issues regarding the deployment of the workforce, whereas we have been able to adjust production on the machine with relative ease.

Professional Efficiencies

“Although the addition of the Weinmann machine has not changed the type of customers we supply, it has had an effect on the professionalism of our operation. For a start, the factory simply looks more professional with the machine in place, but more importantly, there has been a hidden benefit. It has disciplined us to organise the work processes so that components, assembled parts and materials are all in the right place at the right time to ensure we maximise the efficiencies to be gained from the frame station.

“Now we are maximising our 46 strong workforce throughout our 11,000 sq. ft. facility and the quality consistency of our output provides a better finished product for our customers, from local developers to regional and national contractors. There is no doubt that I would recommend this frame station to any manufacturer looking to improve output and flexibility,” concludes Smith.

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Picture courtesy of Oakbridge Homes