



TOOLING PROGRESS REPORT

The TPR sat down to talk with Mike Walter, General Manager of MET Plastics, Inc. in Elk Grove Village, IL. MET Plastics specializes in low- to medium-volume production tooling and processing, particularly with aluminum tooling.

1) What is your company niche and what does your company do that is notable, unique or different?

We specialize in low volume molding and mold building. Our mold specialty is aluminum molds but we also do P-20 molds and some hardened steel molds. We've been building aluminum tooling for 35 years and that's really where we excel. We like to say that we're basically a low-volume molder but we come with all the bells and whistles of a high volume molder, offering part design assistance, tight tolerance molding, assembly and decorating in addition to our primary services. We know what's required to build an aluminum tool that will have some durability. Large part molding is also one of our niches. We do fast-turnaround tool building and mold a variety of commodity and engineering grade resins including ABS, Acetal, Nylon, PBT Polyester, Polycarbonate, PC, PE, PP, PPS, PEI, and more.

2) When and how did you get into the industry, what attracted you to it?

I grew up in the industry. It's a family business and I have been working here part time since I was in high school. My dad started the company with two partners in 1970. He bought the company outright in the 1980's. It was originally called MET Prototype Molding. At that time we built strictly prototype tooling and did limited runs, pilot runs. I came on board full time about 10 years ago. After a few years of trying to figure things out, due to the changes in the industry, I finally started taking the company in a new direction and focused on low volume tooling and production.



Mike Walter, General Manager of MET Plastics, Inc. in Elk Grove Village, IL.

3) Relate a notable "best time" for your company.

One best time, and I wasn't active full-time with the company yet, was in the early 80's when we moved from our facility in Chicago to Elk Grove Village. There was a lot of growth going on then with prototype work. I would say that now is our other best time because we're growing and we finally figured out who we are and what direction we want to head in. We found our niche and we're very comfortable with where it's taking us.



MET Plastics Toolroom and the Moldmaking Team.

4) Similarly, relate notable challenges that your company has overcome.

In 2001, when we moved to a new facility and basically tripled our size, the economy went south. That was a great challenge. We were working very long hours for a couple of years after that just to keep the company busy and start it moving in a new direction. Luckily we were able to get a couple of large tooling orders from new and old customers and it helped give us the jump start that we needed.



MET Plastics, Inc. in Elk Grove Village, IL.



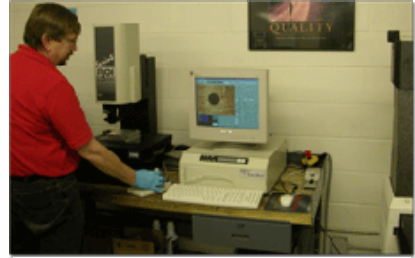
TOOLING PROGRESS REPORT

5) When you are working on projects with your customers, what aspects would you like them to better recognize?

They need to get the molders and mold makers involved early on a project so that the design doesn't evolve needlessly into something that is not moldable or is too expensive to produce. They also need to recognize that mold builders can be much more effective as partners rather than being regarded as a commodity. Mold builders can provide immeasurable value to a project if customers think along partnership lines.

6) List newly acquired technology, machinery or key personnel (in last year).

We haven't added anything in our tool room in the last year; however we added a 720-ton press in our production dept. and also purchased an optical CMM for our quality dept. We've been adding capacity in our assembly dept. through new personnel as well.



Optical CMM for the Quality Department.

7) Has your company recently expanded? Plans to expand or form partnerships/alliances?

We expanded four years ago as I mentioned earlier and tripled our size. We're currently investigating partnerships with companies both domestic and offshore. We're looking for opportunities to expand that way and grow further. We've also added an assembly department and are looking to continue to expand that end of our business. We've seen about 20% growth in the last year and expect that will continue.



8) Are you involved in any industry organizations or educational programs related to the trade?

We're members of the American Mold Builders Association (AMBA) and I have been president of the AMBA Chicago Chapter for the last two years. We're also active with Mid America Plastics Partners (MAPP), which is similar to the AMBA except it's for processors; and we're members of the Tooling & Manufacturing Association (TMA).

9) What do you think about changes occurring in the industry due to globalization? How has it affected the way you do business?

I think it's created a double standard within the industry. We found that customers have developed a different set of requirements for overseas vendors than they have for domestic vendors. But it's made us review all of our business costs and streamline them where possible. It's also helped us to define our niche so that we don't compete strictly on price. There's definitely a double standard, but we've managed to work around that and continue to serve our customers successfully.

10) What will the industry look like in 3 to 5 years?

It will be smaller with much consolidation. Globalization will play an increasingly important role. Hopefully we, as an industry, will be selling more to other nations because U.S. molders and mold builders will be further defining their niches and offering those capabilities to the rest of the world.



TOOLING PROGRESS REPORT

Additional Background Information

Number of years in business: 35

Current number of employees: 30

Current square footage (each location): 30,000 sq ft

Additional locations: none at this time

Website: www.metplastics.com

Types of tools built and/or run: Low volume tooling in aluminum & P-20, hardened steel also

Industries served: Medical, Business Equipment, Service and Aerospace/Defense