

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE (FORMERLY WOODWORDS)

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"Is Machinery the Answer to Your Problems?" by Tom Whatley and Jerry Burney

Having been connected to this industry for the past 35 years, we have seen many innovations in truss manufacturing machinery. As production demands have increased due to more complex trusses, a lack of skilled labor and increased competition, truss manufacturers are constantly seeking answers to how they can build better and more efficiently.

Manufacturers often believe that buying another piece of equipment their problems will easily be solved. Fortunately, our industry has many suppliers of excellent equipment from which to choose. There is a broad range of choices, from small hand tools to computerized saws and assembly equipment. The question remains, however: "Are we as an industry really addressing the needs of truss manufacturing?" The answer is "yes" in some areas and "no" in others.

Yes, in regard to pressing plates and cutting lumber. We have integrated computers and other technology into building machines that can meet high production demands. Work orders can now be downloaded directly to the shop floor; there are lasers to show the exact placement of lumber and plates; and automatic stacking machines are used to stack the finished trusses.

In every area of truss production there have been improvements to existing equipment, as well as innovations.

So why do we hear manufacturers express disappointment over their production? Is it that the machinery is not available? No, the options in this area are limited only by the amount of money you are willing to spend.

If machinery is not the answer, then where are we lacking in addressing this problem? We would contend that it is in how we use resources currently available to us. How many times during the course of the day are the new machines we have installed sitting idle? That new saw or assembly equipment for which you have paid dearly will not operate or produce trusses any faster than raw material is brought to it and finished products taken away.

This is one of the ways where state-of-the-art equipment is being limited by poor material flow in the plant. If a truss manufacturer lacks strong management skills, new and innovative machinery will not necessarily be the answer for improving efficiency in the plant.

As suppliers, we must do a better job of looking at the entire process of truss manufacturing. Let's provide our manufacturers with better ideas on production instead of just another machine. Truss manufacturers must examine their operations thoroughly before requesting a

new piece of machinery. There are times when an alternative will cost nothing more than an open and willing mind. This is all the more reason to be a member of an organization like the WTCA, which is an organization dedicated to finding solutions to all of our common concerns.

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