

Eager Machine, Inc.*

PARTNERING, NOT COMPETING WITH ITS PLASTICS SUPPLIER

When Eager Machine, Inc., began shopping for a plastics supplier several years ago, the company's owner asked one simple question.

"I wanted to know which suppliers did machining on the side," said Mark Eager, president of Eager Machine. "To me, it's a conflict of interest."

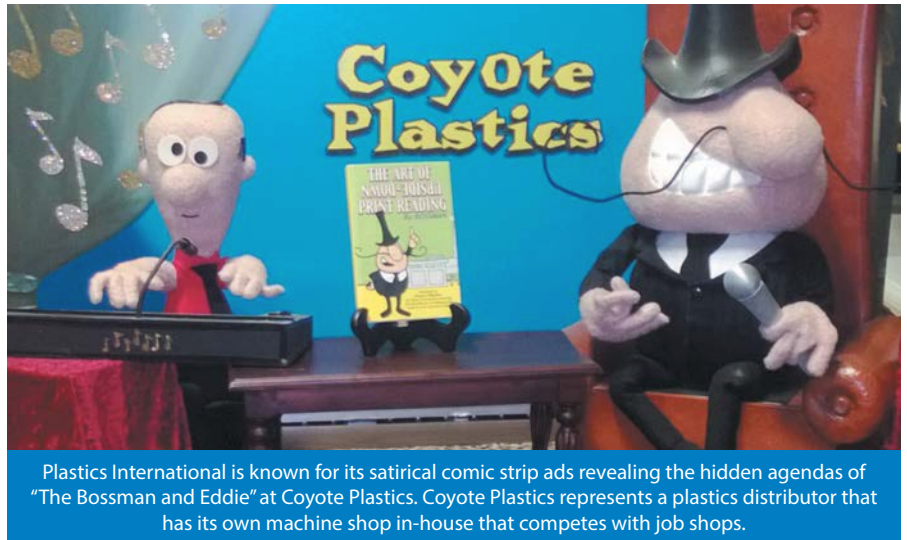
Eager was surprised to learn that many plastics suppliers have their own machine shop in-house, allowing those plastics suppliers to compete with Eager Machine for similar customers or jobs. As a small business owner, Eager questioned whether he would be giving business to trusted suppliers or silent competitors.

"With some suppliers, you have to wonder whether they might see a good project and turn it over to their own team," Eager said. "So we made a decision to deal with vendors that supply only materials, nothing else. That way, we can openly share information with them and don't have to worry about them becoming a competitor down the road."

Plastics International is one of the few plastics suppliers in the country that doesn't own a machine shop or have internal machining capabilities that compete with job shops. Known for its comic strips depicting "Bossman" and "Eddie" at "Coyote Plastics," Plastics International has focused its business exclusively on supplying plastics since 1985. Its huge warehouse inventory of engineering grade plastics includes a wide variety of rods, sheets, tubes, and films that can be cut to order, including many materials and sizes that other plastics suppliers don't stock or would require minimum order quantities to ship.

Trust is the main reason Eager Machine has remained a customer for more than a decade, but it's not the only reason.

"The people they have on their sales staff are second to none in knowledge," Eager said. "I can call and ask about almost any kind of plastic and they'll tell me everything I need to know about its



properties and applications. They're the only plastics supplier we use, because we know we're getting excellent customer service and a fair price."

Working with a sales staff that's willing to problem solve with shops is another strength that Eager Machine appreciates. One customer, for example, couldn't figure out why its nylon parts were passing inspection in Minnesota, but failing inspection in Florida. Plastics International pointed out that nylon absorbs more moisture than any other plastic, so the parts were likely swelling in Florida's hot, humid weather. The engineering staff suggested using an alternative material, Delrin, which allowed the new parts to pass inspection in both states without any further problems.

Quality and traceability are important to Eager Machine as well. Many of Eager's plastic parts are for the medical industry, which makes up about a quarter of its business. Plastics International can trace medical materials back to the exact batch and lot number of the producing mill. That's because the company adheres to a high-quality business strategy for stock materials. Unlike plastics suppliers that have a

low-pricing business strategy based on cheap overseas resins produced by unsupported manufacturing outlets, Plastics International relies mainly on internally qualified domestic manufacturers with readily available quality and tech support staffs in place.

To further illustrate the importance of quality and traceability, a company discovered they had parts that were machined from defective glass-filled Ultem. The machine shop had purchased the defective material from the lowest cost supplier available and not from Plastics International. Because the machine shop was unable to provide a batch and lot number with the rejected material, Plastics International was asked to send the material to their lab for analysis. The lab discovered a filler had been added to the resin during the manufacturing process. While the filler was probably added as an extrusion aid and to lower the cost of the material, it also lowered the physical properties of the glass-filled Ultem that led to its failure.

"We know Plastics International uses good, quality material that is domestically produced, so we don't have to worry about problems down the road," Eager said.

“And if there ever is a problem, they’re very good about addressing my concerns and resolving the issues. That’s important because the true test of a vendor is when things go bad, not when things go well.”

Finally, customer service is another factor Eager appreciates about Plastics International. He can call and speak to a live person right away without dialing through an automated system. He can email an order and have it shipped the same day or in a week when he needs it. He can even call or email a specific person without worrying whether he or she is out of the office because staff cover each other’s phone and email messages.

“You can buy plastic out of a catalog, but you’re not going to get nearly the same level of quality, traceability and customer service,” Eager said. “In fact, you might not know who or what you’re dealing with.”

About Eager Machine

A former Association president, Eager has been actively involved in recruiting and educating machinists as

well as advocating for policies that will support the machining sector.

After working as a machinist for 5 years in telecommunications, Eager started his own shop in 1991 with a single machine. It didn’t take long for the company to grow. Over the next few years, he expanded into different markets, added more equipment and hired additional employees. In 2004 he moved the company and began taking an active role at local schools, community programs and manufacturing associations.

The company enjoyed steady growth and Eager knew it would only be a matter of time before he would need more room again. In 2008, he purchased a brand new building with twice as much space. And in 2009, he doubled his employees and added several new machines.

Today, Eager employs 20 people and offers a range of value-added capabilities, including assembly, subassembly and testing. Its products range from close-tolerance medical components to after-

market equipment for race cars, which are distributed worldwide. The shop has become a preferred supplier to several OEMs and contract shops in the Midwest and is ISO 9001: 2008 certified.

About Plastics International

A family-owned business, Plastics International is based in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. It supplies hundreds of different types of sheet, rod, tube and film plastics to customers around the world. In fact, it has one of the largest inventories of engineering-grade plastics in the country. Over the years, Plastics International has built a reputation for providing excellent customer service and same-day service on most cut-to-size orders.

“A machine shop owner recently said to us, ‘You’re easy to do business with,’” said Paul Carter, vice president at Plastics International. “That’s a win-win compliment we never get tired of hearing. We enjoy developing long-term relationships with customers and helping them succeed.”

* As a courtesy to Mark, the names have been changed to protect the innocent



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