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MONITORING MEDICAL PROCESSES, REAL TIME

As the list of plastics processors has shrunk from 15,000 to 6,000 in the past decade and many processors in the U.S. continue to struggle in today's economy, companies are reaching out to technology to be competitive against overseas markets.

ATEK Plastics, a medical ISO certified molder, is among the few plastics processors that are reaching out and utilizing technology to stay on top and thriving. In June 2010, ATEK partnered with RJG and IQMS for real time process monitoring joint development. ATEK is now the first processor in the world to see process data flow from RJG eDart systems to IQMS real time process monitoring database.

"We saw an opportunity to become more efficient and accurate by automating production reporting processes as well as using the stability of our Oracle database for long term medical data storage," says Tom Houdeshell, President of ATEK Plastics.

ATEK predominately manufactures components for the medical market which includes cardiac surgery, stem cell therapy and pre-surgical skin preparation. Just last year, ATEK landed 6 new large Medical OEM customers. "The increase in medical molding and our unique medical culture has driven the rationale behind the project," says Houdeshell.

All custom injection molding operations involved in medical manufacturing sales have been effected by this project. Production processes, customer reporting and inventory control were also positively affected by the ability to retrieve and analyze process data for an indefinite period of time. Automated production reporting has removed manual input and human error out of the equation.

This joint development allows ATEK to receive easier storage and retrieval of production records. Visual or text alert notifications are sent/ received when rejects, cycle time or other critical processing parameters are meeting their designated limits. It also allows designated remote access through PDAs or laptops. The integrated data is stored in an Oracle database which gives ATEK drill down capabilities and easier sorting of collected real-time data. Up-to-

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date automated production reporting is also available through this integrated system. Not only will this system allow tighter control but it will provide a basis of growth as both RJG & IQMS grows.

The Kerrville based company has expanded rapidly over the past decade, from 2001 sales of \$4.7M to \$14M in 2010. The difference Houdeshell says “has been our increase of medical molding over the last decade”. ATEK shipped 49M parts in 2001 with 6.6% representing medical. In 2010 ATEK shipped 176M parts with 94% of their sales representing medical.

Under Houdeshell, ATEK Plastics began to improve manufacturing through methods like lean principles, decoupled molding, documented process control and automation. ATEK’s highly automated production floor and automated work cells are equipped with individual eDart system monitors and full servo robotics supported by product specific vision systems and box loaders.

ATEK has expertise in custom molding projects including over molding, in mold labeling, insert molding and is multi shot capable. Their facility currently has four 100,000 class clean rooms and is equipped with an in-house quality lab and a full service tool room equipped for EC’s, repairs and PM’s.

With the adaptation of scientific molding and automation the company is able to run lean and efficient with stable processes and less man power. In 2010 ATEK was able to ship \$5.41 per every dollar of labor.

Since this joint development, IQMS has nominated ATEK Plastics for Progressive Manufacturer of the Year for the Real Time Process Monitoring project.

ATEK Plastics is also a 2010 Processor of Year finalist, nominated by RJG & IQMS.

For more information on ATEK Plastics and ATEK Companies, visit www.atekplastics.com.

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