



Where in the World is Paul Nugent?

PAUL NUGENT | MNOP

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

NOTES FROM THE ROAD

It's a strange feeling but the reality is that I really can't talk about the specifics of most of what I do anymore (the bane and the joy of consulting). However, there are always common themes to report from travelling around the world, so here are three recent simple messages from the wonderful world of rotomolding (note, while the names of the innocent have been omitted to protect their virtue, all references to real life are intentional and should be heeded by rotomolders large and small...).

The Good

On a recent trip to Spain, I was given a tour of a very nicely organized plant by a 30-year industry veteran (a nice surprise in itself). Now while Spain may not be the high-tech center of Europe, there is still a high expectation for quality in their society (they certainly know their wine, tapas, and shoes!) and this seems to be reflected in at least one rotomolder's vision of production. What made it feel good to see this plant? Sure they had relatively modern machines and a nicely laid out production floor and yes, the building was well lit and clean and there were signs of natural lean manufacturing everywhere. However, it was the simple explanation of how they like to do things right that appealed - there were few concerns about bad parts here. They make sure the designs are initially right through their development team, spend time setting up a process that gives them what they need in the molded parts and then implement regular QC measurements and records to ensure that it stays that way. And it showed. The flow of production was clear, the points at which parts were checked were clear and the parts looked good. Not only that, their order



A Chilly Night in Seattle, Home to Coffee, Microsoft, and Google!



books were full and reported margins were also good. What more can you ask for?

The Bad

Back in the UAE things didn't look so great. Where do I start? Trying to produce high-quality parts which have a demanding in-service performance requirement on equipment that is simply not capable just doesn't make sense - but, unfortunately, seems to happen all the time. It is always hard to join a project late and comment gently on the quality of prior decisions but in this case the core issue of choosing a cheap machine was tough to ignore. Thankfully the molds were made overseas and were of good quality and we were able to persuade them to reformulate their material to withstand the harsh UV environment of the Middle East. However, a short-term outlook of saving money on initial capital outlay rapidly turned bad when the reality of production set in. To compensate for the lack of capability of the machine, cycle times are now around twice what they probably need to be and based on current order volumes, the cost of lost production could pay for a new (high-quality) machine approximately every eight months. A process is only truly low-cost if it encompasses the entire production cycle...

The Ugly

This is the one you have to really watch out for. Even the best molders can suffer from ugly customers. And the sad thing is that they often start out good looking and turn bad quickly. The maxim of this tale is never believe a customer who tells you that they will manage their own quality control and that there is nothing critical about their parts; there is always a performance expectation for a part. Back in the US, a molder (only one you ask?) is struggling with a customer who thinks they know more about molding than they do, changes molding tolerances mid-stream without any adjustment to mold dimensions, rejects parts for variable reasons (and accepts them when orders are pressing), and ignores a long history of acceptable performance. Things become really ugly when they start arguing over the details: Where are the agreed upon quality requirements? What are the parts really expected to do in-service? Where are the in-process quality control records? Not fun, not productive, just plain ugly.

The bottom line is simple: think about every short-term action with a longer term view; bad parts can cost more in reputation than their replacement; total production costs are dominated by day-to-day costs rather than initial outlay.

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