

Rush Hour

Joshua Gabriel

Framerica shares its successful system for production rush orders.

You have undoubtedly been in a situation where you land a big job—all conditioned on it being completed (perfectly) and shipped immediately. This “rush” is familiar to any business. Hearing “I need it yesterday” or else “there is no order” is now common. Meeting difficult deadlines, however trying, can increase a customer’s confidence in you as a supplier while also building a lasting relationship. If rush orders can become a realistic part of your day-to-day business, they can provide a tremendous revenue stream, especially when your competitors are forced to turn away those orders.

Is it possible, though, to produce a top-quality product in a fraction of the time, all while remaining profitable? According to successful moulding and wall decor manufacturers, the answer is yes. Those who are willing and able to produce rush jobs have two things in common: they maintain strong relationships with domestic vendors who can react quickly to raw material requirements, and they have well-crafted “flow systems” in place.

Framerica Corporation, a New York-based moulding manufacturer, often faces rush orders. In fact it created a system that has the capacity to provide large quantities of moulding with very little lead time. Not long ago Framerica received a call explaining that a large job was due in just under a week.



Multiple production lines allow Framerica to process rush orders without interrupting the flow of normal business.

The customer had already ordered 50,000 feet of moulding from overseas, but the order was delayed in customs and not available. The specifications for the job required an exact moulding profile that had to be “in-house” within three days in order to successfully complete the

job on time. The client faxed an image of the moulding hoping Framerica had that profile in inventory. Although it was not a stock item, Framerica engineers created a CAD drawing of the profile within an hour, which they used to create the knives necessary for the item to be in pro-

duction within two hours. The 50,000 feet of moulding was milled that day and ready to be finished the following morning. By the afternoon, the footage had been inspected, boxed, and was en route to the client.

Framerica’s ability to fulfill very large orders without significant lead times is made possible in part through the use of customized machinery and its more than 20 production lines. That and its commitment to keeping a large stock of finished product and raw materials gives the company the ability to fill rush orders quickly.

“Customers have become increasingly less likely to give advance notice of a large order, many times because their own customers pro-



Keeping large quantities of raw material gives Framerica flexibility as to which mouldings to mill and produce that day.

vide short lead times,” says Jason Van Vechten, FramERICA’s vice president of production. “Our goal was to enhance our manufacturing capabilities to the point where we could react instantly to any requests, and fill large orders quickly.” Van Vechten believes FramERICA’s in-house engineers play an important role in the company’s “lean production,” a term used to signify efficiency. “The ability to build customized state-of-the-art machinery and the ability to alter our machines to improve efficiency has made us one of the only companies in the industry that can truly respond immediately,” says Van Vechten. “Our team takes pride in never saying no to a customer based on time or order size.”

Stories like this are not uncommon for FramERICA and others, as the picture framing industry is becoming far more reliant upon Just in Time (JIT) inventory—particularly considering the unpredictability associated with importing. To allow rush orders and generally afford consistently short lead times, production executives design their factories for high-volume production



Workers are placed at the beginning and end of a production line, essentially setting the pace at an OEM factory. Floaters such as the man on the right loading the frames assist with the busiest stations.

with multiple production lines, accommodating rush orders without disrupting the flow of normal schedules.

Bob Bagnano, president of Sundance Art in Phoenix, AZ, uses a flexible workforce strategy to produce more than 1000 pieces of framed art per day. The company insists on high-volume output, but refuses to accept any reduced quality. Bagnano credits his dedicated staff and their skill as a major force in accomplishing the company’s goals. Bagnano also notes, “OEM framing has

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become increasingly automated, which has made efficiency, quality, and high output a reality. We also believe in stocking large quantities of finished products rather than raw materials—a strategy that allows us to fill large orders quickly.”

Sundance accommodates its high demand with volume ordering—receiving raw goods in crates, containers, and pallets (all bulk-style packaging systems) to provide reduced costs and easier unloading. Keeping overtime at a minimum is a major factor in cost maintenance, and efficiency oftentimes revolves around having talented and dedicated workers. “It is the backbone of any successful production company,” Bagnano says,

More than ever, OEM framers are cognizant of the need for JIT inventory, and the demand for it from their own customers. Jaime Mizrahi of Monarch Art and Frame in Van Nuys, CA, has perfected the ability to provide volume framing quickly. “In today’s marketplace buyers are far less likely to have the luxury of significant lead times—even for very large orders,” says Mizrahi. “We feel extremely fortunate to have a work force that can adapt to the rigors of ‘flexible’ production.”

“Flexible” production is accomplished by training some key people as “floaters”—multitasking workers who can be moved to different workstations when needed to optimize production. Although floaters will assist the busiest stations on the production line, the large majority of workers remain in fixed, steady work positions.

When producing a rush job, the floaters can be diverted to the beginning of the production line to speed up processing of the components, essentially setting the pace. When moulding is delivered, for example, extra workers unwrap the material, stack it at each saw, and feed material to the cutters. Materials are immediately retrieved (the cut pieces) and brought to the joining area. To maximize efficiency, cutters never leave their station—essentially speeding up the pace. The same process is used in the glass, matting, mounting, and assembly departments. As work progresses through each station, the floating workers are returned to their usual positions in the assembly line or moved to different departments as needed. The production manager

has to monitor all departments, recognize where there is a surplus or shortage of labor, and assign floaters to optimize workflow. This approach ensures all departments work smoothly and that there is significantly less downtime.

Maintaining solid relationships with strong domestic suppliers is crucial for any company seeking to successfully provide rush services. Affording flexible factory production workflow and good relationships with talented vendors will leave a company with more efficient production and the ability to say “yes” to more jobs than they ever thought possible. ■



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