

Quick Tips

Easy ideas to improve production efficiency

An Equipment Maintenance Log

You know you're supposed to service and maintain your equipment, right? But how good is your staff at actually doing the maintenance when it's scheduled? If you want to dramatically improve your maintenance program, make sure you have an equipment maintenance log.

Set up a binder with a section for each piece of equipment. Include information for each machine, such as serial and model numbers, who it was purchased from and when, and any special features or options it may have. Include phone numbers of service providers and parts vendors. You can also include special service instructions and tools needed. Then track what work was done, when it was done, who did the work, and where you found parts and other valuable notes.

This will not only help you keep a history of service and maintenance as staff changes, but it can also be a valuable resource as you consider what new equipment to buy. It can even help with warranty issues. And while you're at it, schedule maintenance by writing it on a calendar that everyone can see. Gather, organize, and store all the equipment manuals in one place. You might even photocopy the maintenance and troubleshooting sections and include them in your maintenance log for quick and easy access.

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Lights, Action, Framing!

To keep your employees working as efficiently as possible, it's important to make sure that there's always enough work at each station so workers don't have to wait on materials. You also need to be prepared to tackle occasional problems at each workstation as quickly as possible. The more workstations you have, the more often you're likely to face both situations.

First, make sure your workstations allow you to set up three to five pieces without interfering with the workspace needed to produce the product. Assuming you have enough production that you need a person to set up workstations so that operators or assemblers can do their work without leaving their stations, you need an easy way for those workers to notify the setup person visually when there's a problem. That way, you won't have nine people yelling at once or have people not being heard in a noisy facility.

Our solution was to install flashing lights at each workstation so that operators/assemblers could let the setup person know when there was a problem or if they were running low on work (less than three pieces). This enables the setup person to bring more work or to handle problems without slowing down the production line.

Renoir Battle
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Employees with Big Ideas

One of the best things of any production framing operation is the ingenuity of the people who are actually doing the work. When faced with recurring problems, some of them are creative in coming up with simple-to-use, inexpensive ideas.

One such problem is the scratching of art and frames during the fitting process. Working in a volume production environment, many frames are "spun" on fitting tables instead of being picked up and turned. Even with soft materials on the tables, scratches can appear on gold, silver, or lacquer frames. A similar problem can occur when stretching canvases, especially giclées.

While slowing down and handling pieces properly is a prime directive from management, an employee suggested an alternative: using scrap pieces of suede matboard under the frame that could be used to turn it during fitting. A suede mat scrap is drymounted to a piece of cardboard or other scrap material. This "soft" board is then placed on a fitting table, and the art or sensitive frame placed on it during fitting.

As the piece is worked on, the whole board is turned with the art and frame on it. This reduces the amount of movement of the piece on the table. When a frame is finished, the board is cleaned off with a brush or compressed air and set aside until needed again.

This method offers a simple, inexpensive solution to a recurring problem. Damages are significantly reduced while production flow remains constant.

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Contributors to this column are industry members who have experience in production framing operations. If you have a tip of your own, please send it to Quick Tips, PFM Production, 207 Commercial Court, Morganville, NJ 07751.