

# SLOANE GROUP - SHOPPING FOR PROFIT



Established in Sloane Square in London over 35 years ago, The Sloane Group was moved to its present premises in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire in 1988. As the business developed, the need to have both wood, plastics, print and metal became increasingly important and in 1991 this objective was achieved with the metalwork fabrication facility of Norank Murrell Ltd based in Mildenhall in Suffolk - both companies being shopfitting designers, manufacturers and installers. The result of this amalgamation was that The Sloane Group became one of the leading manufacturers of point of sale systems and graphics.

Today, turnover from these two sites has substantially increased

and the portfolio of companies within the group includes a number of high profile trade names from further acquisitions. They supply to some of the best known supermarket chains, motor manufacturers and prominent high street retailers, some of which are known on a global basis. They offer a bespoke design and build service, including interactive POS information centres. The Sloane Group is owned by The Marmon Group Inc. based in

Chicago whose devolved interests include 600 autonomous operations worldwide.

In a very competitive market place a number of internal programmes have been implemented in keeping with World Class Manufacturing Supplier status. Peter Moore, Group Manufacturing Director said: "We have doubled our turnover in the last five years which in itself has encouraged us to achieve 'Best Practice'. This

includes substantial reductions in raw material and work in progress due to the philosophy of Continuous Improvement and a higher degree of planning. Our workforce is now multi-skilled and our machinery is state of art and this means that we have almost full mobility of labour which enables us to move employees from different cells to meet varying production demands. Obviously associated with this is the employees'



familiarity with the manufacturing equipment controls and software necessary to meet these requirements. This philosophy has enabled us to eliminate seasonal temporary employment and so reduce costs substantially at the same time as improving and maintaining high quality." Walking around the



Mildenhall factory, the line up of AMADA Laser, Turret, Press Brake and Guillotine equipment is immediately impressive as is the Lean manufacturing cell system with publicised performance skills matrix and individual roles clearly defined.

The powder coating plant has recently been the subject of a complete cost and efficiency analysis in keeping with their World Class Philosophy compliance. DELTA PROCESS SYSTEMS, who originally installed the system some 12 years ago, have recently installed a new wet paint system at the Wellingborough plant associated with wood finishing. David Meller, Managing Director of DELTA said: "We have worked hand in hand with The Sloane Group for many years and are proud to be associated with their success. We are involved in all aspects of the finishing process with a huge portfolio of satisfied customers. Feed-back regarding the performance of individual manufacturer's equipment is always of interest, especially when we are able to use this knowledge to save other customers money, hence our involvement with ITW GEMA.

Their latest range of manual and automatic powder application equipment is right at the top in terms of performance, after care and value for money."



With in excess of 150 live colours and smaller batch quantities according to client demand, The Sloane Group spray to waste, so powder trans-

fer efficiency and powder output control are of the highest importance in order to minimise waste. John Hughes, who manages the powder coating section

said: "We evaluated the new ITW GEMA EASY manual powder coating unit with a single gun on our fast track line. Initial trials were very encouraging and therefore we purchased a single unit for this facility. We found the savings to be substantial over our previous equipment so proceeded to purchase a two gun EASY unit for our main powder facility. On this line over a five month period, we made a detailed study of efficiency and performance. We have found that we are sav-

ing 12 per cent virgin powder and that waste is down from 41 per cent to 26 per cent. The equipment has been less expensive to maintain and the service provided by ITW Gema and their local distributor, Anglair, has been excellent. Obviously we are delighted and believe we have identified the best package to carry our powder plant forward."

The Sloane Group see their work-force as their most important asset. Paul Bird, Continuous Improvement Manager said: "We have spent a substantial amount of time and money to ensure our operation is efficient in terms of quality and cost. Our 'World Class Manufacturing Initiative' has already substantiated a considerable number of positive changes, most importantly in morale in the work force. We have looked closely at each manufacturing process from Goods Inwards through to installation, and initiated improvements

which have resulted in an increase in efficiency. The key for us has been operator involvement at all stages. Being team driven, we have been able to move extremely quickly to achieve our ongoing goals."

The Sloane Group plan a manageable and sustainable growth strategy over the next five years. Peter Moore summed up by saying: "We want to provide the best service we possibly can for our customers and this will be achieved by the elimination of non added value elements which the client should obviously not be expected to pay for. In conjunction with this, we also need to stay abreast of industry technology so that we can offer the correct and most up to date solution.

In order to develop a World Class Supplier status, we needed to build strong partnerships with the best possible suppliers to our business, enabling us to focus on our customers and our future."

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