

FLOW-ON BENEFITS

Being small doesn't mean a prefabrication plant can't benefit from the latest in technology and operational management systems.

Being small also doesn't mean you can't think big - or think smart!

Pro Prefabs in Mordialloc, a bayside suburb of Melbourne, is a classic example of a small business adopting technology and keeping up with the latest developments in order to maximise profit and reduce wastage.

This very progressive and extremely successful small business is owned and operated by two brothers: Vlas and George Salatas.

Vlas is the elder of the two and has come into the prefabrication business via a rather unique path - he spent most of his working life as a technical manager for an ingredient supplier to the confectionary industry.

For George the journey has been far more predictable - starting as a truss and frame detailer and then technical support manager - until eventually opening Pro Prefabs in 2004.

"George's knowledge of the industry and the running of a prefabrication plant is invaluable, he really has a feel for the business," said Vlas.

"I suppose my experience in plant

management and processing brings other insights to the table. We work together well as a team."

George runs the roof truss side of the business whilst Vlas is in charge of floor trusses - in particular, PosiStruts.

"Even though we focus on different areas of the business, when you're this small (there are three staff on the floor), everyone has to pitch in - you have to be multi-skilled, be prepared to share the load to help meet deadlines and the like," added Vlas.

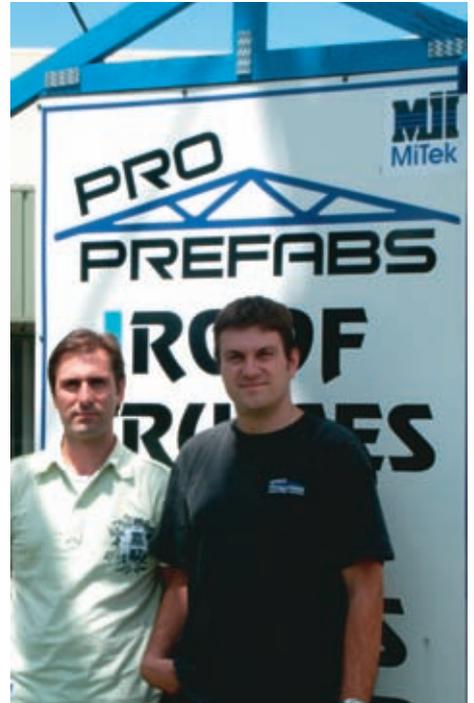
In order to take some of the burden off themselves - and to improve operating efficiencies George and Vlas have adopted several of MiTek's systems.

These include the 20/20 program and the relatively new OptiFlow paperless production system.

Vlas and George were originally introduced to OptiFlow by Mark Smiles, MiTek senior fabricator support manager for Victoria.

"I was in there one day, laptop in hand and overheard Vlas and George discussing some of the day-to-day hassles of running their business - one of these included constantly running back and forth between the office and the jig solving dimension issues," Mark remembered.

"I showed them a brief presentation on



■ Picture at the Pro Prefab plant in Melbourne's southern beachside suburb of Mordialloc are brothers Vlas and George Salatas.

OptiFlow and took them through a rough working model of the program and they were sold on it!

"When can we have it was the response.' I asked them a few questions about their business and told them we could configure the OptiFlow options to suit their operations," said Mark.

"Most fabricators will trial OptiFlow first, but Vlas and George were so enthusiastic they wanted a clean break from their old paper system - completely!

"It was paper production on Friday and paperless on the Monday," Mark smiled.

"Some might think going 'cold turkey' is a bold move, but in many ways it was probably better for them in the long run. Their staff just didn't have the comfort zone of being able to go back to their old habits - it was OptiFlow all the way from day one."

Vlas continued: "When we saw the presentation we were hooked - it just seemed so right for our business.

"I'm not normally one to procrastinate, so it made sense to make the change to OptiFlow fast and seamless," said Vlas.

"My experience working with a large, multi-national manufacturer has taught me: 'streamlining and waste' are two of the biggest areas where even the smallest of operations can implement dramatic improvements.

"You'd be amazed at just how much wastage there is in manufacturing in general. One of the first things I noticed with our operations was just how much paper we were using.

"Even a normal sized project might involve 70 odd sheets of paper per job, and if there was a slight change, a whole new set would be printed out," lamented Vlas.

"We were using ream upon ream of



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paper on a daily basis - the wastage and cost was ridiculous.

"Another down-side of the old paper system was the amount of small detail required for a job on paper. Sometimes the guys would spend unnecessary time deciphering which dimension to use to locate components," added Vlas.

"Now everyone knows you can't run an efficient business if the guys in the plant are forever running backwards and forwards asking questions.

"We can't micro-manage. It's just not practical. With OptiFlow it's all a thing of the past! George and I can get on with the day-to-day running of the business now while the manufacturing side tends to look after itself."

"OptiFlow also enables our staff to switch between cutting and jiggling information and can display the distance between any two selected points on a truss.

"Plus, it's all at their fingertips!" exclaimed Vlas. "It only took the guys a couple of days to get used to the new system - they're all young, so working with computers isn't a problem anyway. They just love it!"

Sometimes it's difficult to gauge whether change in operations does have a discernable effect on efficiencies, however with MiTek's OptiFlow Vlas has no doubt about the levels of improvement achieved.

"With paper we were doing roughly 85 to 90 EqA a day - without paper we're now doing 100 to 105 EqA - comfortably.



"There's no comparison, I believe this system has made us a far more efficient and, as a result, more profitable company. It's also helped reduce the likelihood of human error."

George and Vlas are so impressed with the smooth transition and on-going benefits of OptiFlow in their truss assembly line they are looking to implement it in their PosiStrut manufacturing operations too.

"MiTek have a great selection of products, systems and services for fabricators of all sizes. Adopting some of these helps us stay competitive and keep in touch with the latest industry developments. OptiFlow certainly has made our lives a lot easier," said Vlas.

"Best of all, we've upped output by 10 per cent and probably saved a lot of trees in the process!"

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friendly method of prefabrication information technology can help speed up manufacturing and reduce operational costs dramatically. Plus, instant access to information can reduce the margin for error and streamline production. So if you're looking to fast-track your information, go with the flow – OptiFLOW.

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For more information about MiTek's OptiFLOW system or any other MiTek products or systems, call your local state office or visit: www.mitek.com.au
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