

Elkington Brothers' 25-year partnership with Delcam

Elkington Brothers has completed twenty-five years as a customer for Delcam's CAD/CAM software. The Birmingham-based toolmaker installed its first system in 1989, having used traditional methods for the first fifty years following its founding in 1939.



“It was a big decision to move to computerised methods as the software alone cost tens of thousands of pounds and the computers and CNC machines were also much more expensive than they are now,” remembered Elkington Brothers’ Managing Director, James Kelly. “Subsequent years have proved it was the right decision. I’m certain that, if we hadn’t invested in CAD/CAM, we wouldn’t be here now.”

“There were far fewer systems to consider in those days but we still did a thorough evaluation. Delcam seemed to have a different focus, with its emphasis on tooling design and machining, while other systems were more appropriate for component design. The location in Birmingham was also an important factor as we knew we would need a lot of support in the early days.”

Of course, Delcam’s software has undergone huge developments since those days, with much of the improvement prompted by feedback from early customers like Elkington Brothers.

“We have always had a strong partnership with Delcam,” commented Mr. Kelly. “We used to ask “Why can’t we do this?” or “Wouldn’t it be better if we could do that?” and then see the changes appear in the software.”

Elkington Brothers now has seven staff working on the software; three doing design with the [PowerSHAPE CAD software](#), two programming with the [PowerMILL CAM system](#) and two switching between the two programs. Two of the group also use the [PowerINSPECT inspection software](#) for quality control on a Stiefelmayer CMM, with a third about to be trained.

The Delcam programs are used for the company’s complete range of projects, including making many types of tooling, producing models and patterns, and building jigs and fixtures. While almost 90% of the work is for the automotive industry, including a lot of RIM tooling to produce sills, bumpers and spoilers, Elkington Brothers also has customers in the aerospace, agricultural and rail businesses.

“The software has gone from strength to strength over the time we have been a customer,” said Mr. Kelly. “We started out using a lot of typed commands, whereas now everything is done through the user interface. In addition, the developments in both software and hardware mean that calculation times are a fraction of what they used to be.”

The faster calculation times have contributed to substantial time savings. A project like a tool for a headliner used to take twenty-four weeks but this is now down to six weeks if everything goes to plan. The time savings enable Elkington Brothers to be competitive when quoting for work. The faster delivery also benefits the company’s tooling customers because they can start making parts that much sooner.

The accuracy that is possible with the Delcam software is also much better. “Of course, we would never have sent out tooling that wasn’t up to our standards,” explained Mr. Kelly. “However, the software means we can reach the required quality much more quickly with very little hand finishing.”

One thing that hasn’t changed is the number of tools that are modified, either before any parts are produced or after initial samples have been made. “PowerSHAPE makes it very easy to compare models so that we can see what needs to be done or, if substantial changes are required, whether we need to start the project from scratch,” claimed Mr. Kelly. “This means we can prepare a quote for the extra work very quickly and be confident that the price we are asking is realistic.”

Even though Mr. Kelly says that “the software is much easier to pick up now”, he still insists that his staff attend update courses at Delcam on a regular basis. “We still use the helpline

quite a bit,” he said. “Many of the staff that we contact now are the same people that were there when we first bought the software. With all that experience, their knowledge is very impressive. It means that the support is second to none.”

After a difficult time during the latest downturn, Elkington Brothers is now back on a strong growth path. The company has added two extra Hurco machines in the last eighteen months, both offering higher machining speeds and better surface finish. Mr. Kelly is now looking at acquiring the company’s first continuous five-axis machine, after many years of operating 3+2 equipment.

While he is grateful for the work that has resulted from the large investments made by Jaguar Land Rover in the region, Mr. Kelly is looking to broaden his customer base, in particular by trying to bring in more work from the aerospace industry.

Mr. Kelly is also increasing the numbers of staff. He has recruited two apprentices recently and is looking to add one or two more later in the year. The new recruits are keen to learn to use the Delcam software but Mr. Kelly is insisting that they develop their manual skills first, saying “Despite all the benefits we have gained from our CAD/CAM systems, I still believe that our strong traditional skills remain essential to the success of the company.”

For further information on Delcam’s CAD/CAM software, please contact: -
Peter Dickin, Marketing Manager
Direct phone: 44 (0)121 683 1081 e-mail: marketing@delcam.com

Delcam Ltd
Small Heath Business Park,
Birmingham, B10 0HJ, UK
www.delcam.com

Caption: Elkington Brothers uses PowerMILL to produce tooling up to 25 tons in weight