



PRESS RELEASE

Auto leading machine works alongside skilled glass decorators

Village Glass – Essex, England – the name itself conjures up an image of a cosy little business tucked away somewhere nice and pleasant off the beaten track - when current Managing Director Neil Jesse first came across the company, it was!

Things have certainly changed a bit since: the company now employs 240 people within the group, and operates across six manufacturing sites.

The business was actually started in 1984 at the height of the growth of the replacement window industry, and soon gained for itself a good reputation for fair trading.

Ten years later, when ex-Crittall Windows man Neil Jesse advised the then owner that in order to grow the business, it needed to automate, the answer given was that they preferred to remain 'comfortably small', but if they couldn't really remain as they were, would Neil like to make an offer?

So, unexpectedly, he ended up buying the company!

Moving to Witham, Essex, in 1997 with just 20 staff (most of whom are still there), Neil Jesse has run the business very much hands on, and up until only five years ago, was usually still involved in day-to-day sales. But these days Neil tends to take more of a back seat.

The first thing that strikes a visitor to the bustling Freebournes estate, where Village Glass is now situated, is that next door is yet another glass firm, Essex Safety Glass Ltd. But sure enough, this is a sister company, and not a competitor. Opened in 2003 and operating independently, Essex Safety Glass processes and toughens Jumbo sheets while Village Glass makes the sealed units; these friendly neighbours are but two of the six Freebournes based sites that comprise Euroview Manufacturing Ltd., the holding company.

Orders are received in the sales office, from where manufacturing instructions are keyed in and transferred wirelessly to every aspect of production required to fulfil the order, including to Essex Safety Glass next door.

And this is one of the key reasons the business has performed so well in its current guise, taking us right back to that fateful meeting fourteen years ago, when Neil's considered advice was to automate.

Neil, a firm believer in using technology to run in parallel with people, not in place of them, says:

"Machines can do all those tiring and repetitive tasks such as cutting and lifting, and while machines do not lose concentration, it is people's individual skills that can make or break a business."

The new automated lead application table from GED Integrated Solutions perfectly illustrates the point of running machines in parallel with valuable people skills.

While the artistically decorated panels featuring birds and flowers with coloured sections and lead detailing are painstakingly done by hand, the routine – but highly popular – diamonds and squares are now all produced automatically on the machine.

Because the lead application table can accommodate such large sheets of glass, up to 1270mm x 2440mm, patio doors that would before have required two lead applicators working opposite one another, now only want one man to load the glass onto the table and to set the machine to apply the lead automatically and precisely.

"The machine doesn't tire, and the leading is consistently accurate."

The company had previously considered other machine manufacturers attempts at automating their volume leading process, but each one was unsatisfactory from the point of view of size (too small) and reliability (standard reels are not entirely satisfactory).

"The more robust and extra long 50 and 100 metre reels that were specially developed by North Western Lead in conjunction with GED for automatic application, were one of the deciding factors in our choice to go ahead with the table."

Neil first became aware of the GED table from a press mention, and then saw one running at Anglian Windows, which finally convinced him and his colleagues that this table was the solution to automating a highly repetitive and demanding job. "Until that moment we had been eight years waiting for a solution that works."

While always keen to save on labour, Neil is proud to say that the company has never actually laid anyone off, as they see themselves as "builders in life" and not 'just' a company that takes decisions solely for commercial interests.

"When you are bringing in a new machine many staff still feel threatened and so the change has to be handled sensitively. But here at Village Glass they appreciate that we have taken out the tiresome monotony of leading panel after panel all day long and have virtually eliminated the number of remakes that we have to do."

As part of an ongoing team-building exercise, Neil likes to personally relate to each of the factory and office staff and knows something about their lives outside of work. "We're all Village People here!" he jokes. The group has excellent links with the local authority and each year tries to take new people on to provide a helping hand in learning a skill, often in conjunction with day-release college schemes.

With 250 regular trade customers throughout London and the Home Counties, most of their business is gained through reps and reputation:

"We stay within our limits and what we can provide successfully, remaining efficient and cost-effective at all levels, including in sales and transport. We put our hands up if we make a mistake – then put it right."

That sounds like a recipe for success to us!

About GED:

GED Integrated Solutions is a multi-award winning US-based manufacturer that helped pioneer the concept not only of Warm Edge spacer systems through Intercept, but also, with its advanced production equipment and integrated software, of lean manufacturing, where every aspect of IG production is 'tied together' to increase IG quality and production volumes reducing operating costs and materials wastage.

The Decorative Application System (DAS) for automated leading of glass was originally developed with 3M and sales have continued to grow in the UK market as IG manufacturers increasingly look to eliminate costly remakes and reduce labour.

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