

Tooling Up for Better

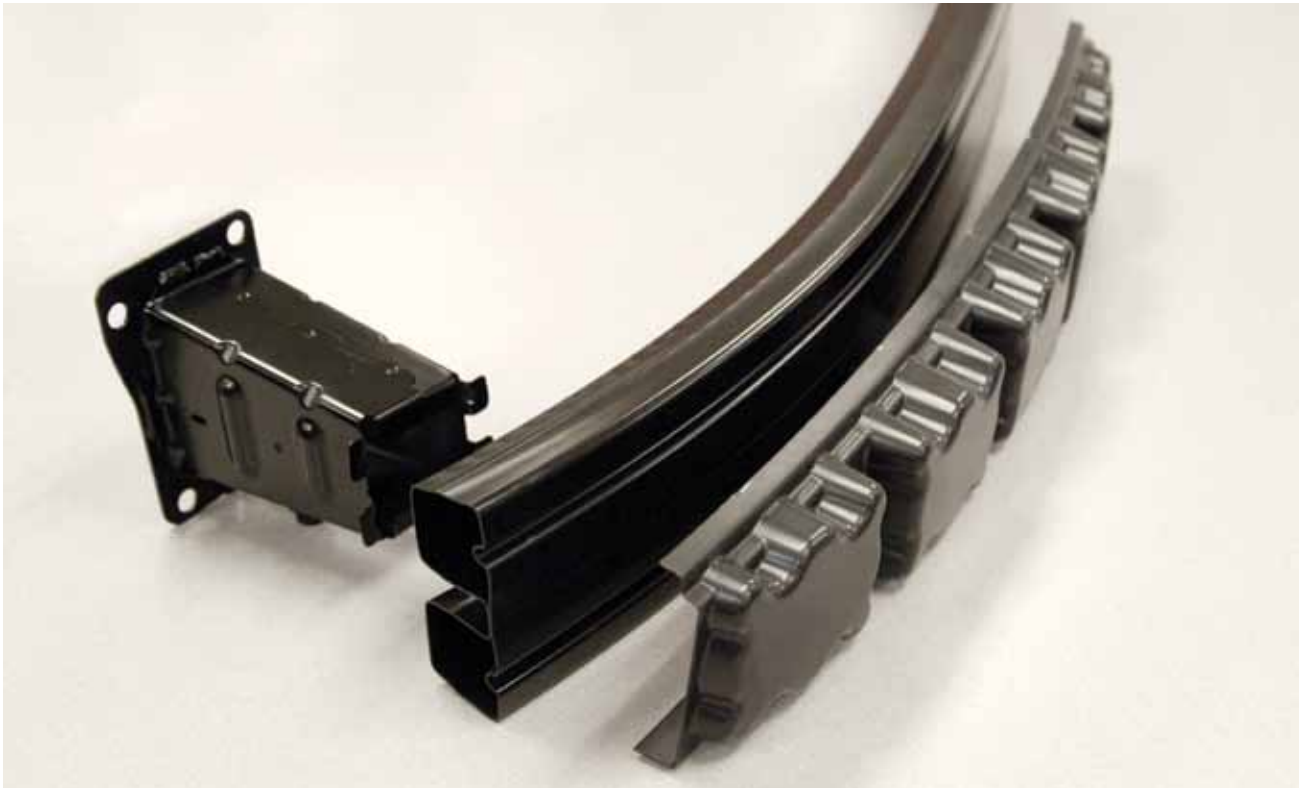
Energy Management

Shape Corp. (Grand Haven, MI), a manufacturer of energy-management systems—components that work together to manage energy during an impact, protecting passengers while reducing damage to the vehicle—needed some “management” support of its own to take its reputation for making exceptional products and delivering them on-time to the next level.

“We pride ourselves on listening to client pain points—and then developing customized, cost-effective solutions that enable them to be significantly more productive and profitable,” said Wes Griffes, group leader—process improvement and a 16-year veteran of the company that also specializes in advanced roll-forming expertise.

“From concept through design, through in-house testing in our lab, through final production, we can develop a single part or a complex assembly. But we also knew that we could improve our efficiencies with more attention paid to our tool-management activities.”

Manufacturer of crash-management components finds itself in better shape after getting a handle on tool consumption.



Detail view of energy absorbing components for a bumper and the “crush can” that goes behind a bumper.

Prior to 2009, Shape used cabinets to house and keep track of its tool usage in the firm's 1835-ft² (171-m²) toolroom during the manufacture of bumpers, pedestrian bars (which prevent pedestrians from being thrown under a vehicle if struck by that vehicle), and various other products the corporation makes for its primary customer, the global automotive industry.

Recognizing the Value of a Vending Machine

But Griffes and his superiors never had a truly accurate read on tool consumption, either for parts produced or materials machined (primarily A2, D2, M2, 4140, prehardened, and cold-rolled steels; plus plastics and nylon) on Shape's six Bridgeport mills, Haas and Mazak CNC units, four grinders, and various drill presses, cut-off saws, and other lathes.

"We knew a vending machine would be a wise investment because we had heard how much time and money had been saved by others with similar tool-tracking issues," said Griffes.

Shape, a multiple winner of General Motors' Supplier of the Year award, then price-shopped and requested demonstrations from leading vending providers. After a lengthy review process, the choice was quite simple:

"We went with MSC Industrial Supply (Melville, NY) because their dispenser was so easy to learn and operate. It's simply intuitive in so many ways, including its automatic tool-reorder feature and its ability to limit access to certain costly tools to only those who actually require those tools," stated Griffes.

But there was more to the package MSC acquired than just a new piece of tool-repository equipment.

Preplanning Pays Off

"Installation and implementation were painless because there was massive pre-planning by both companies. MSC was with us every step of the way to fully train us and to ensure the ideal transfer of what was within our cabinets into our new single-bay machine, and our high-dollar items were given priority space," said Griffes.

Once that process was completed the savings came quickly.

"Within nine months, we realized a reduction of \$55,000 in disposable tool costs. This was a direct result of our dispenser that showed me, in its highly detailed daily reports, exactly who took what to do what—and our total tooling cost. These documents also proved that we had been so focused on not running out of key tools that we simply over-ordered on most occasions, creating excess inventory and the need for someone to regularly supervise our toolroom," claimed Griffes.

But Shape did more than improve its bottom line. It enhanced its workforce, too. Griffes, after seeing the reports that showed how much tooling was actually needed versus what was thought to be needed at any given point, began to use the vending dispenser as a training tool for shop leaders to teach machine operators how to produce their work more efficiently.

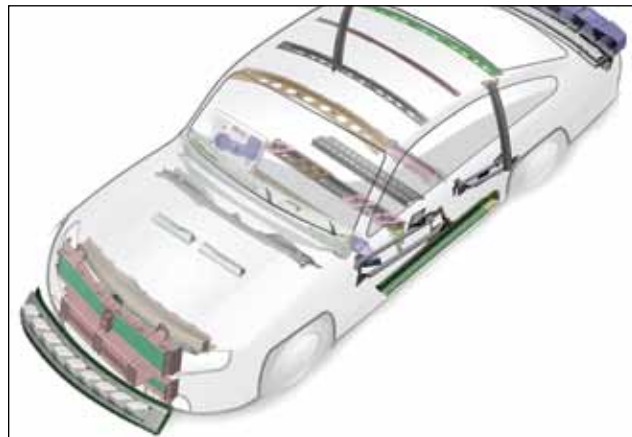
"We showed our machinists how the vending unit was a drastic improvement over our previous tool-replenishment methods [in order] to help make everyone constantly aware of our corporate goal to run a leaner plant," said Griffes.

Multiple Benefits

But there were still other major benefits for this manufacturer that also makes numerous parts for the office furniture, healthcare, and agricultural markets.

"Since the MSC vending machine has literally become my 'eyes' on tool management, I now have far more time to do other more pressing duties throughout our shop," said Griffes. "For example, I can more closely identify and track other training opportunities, including those in some of our other facilities."

In addition, Griffes now dedicates a significant portion of his day to more carefully monitoring work on the floor. He can also lend his expertise as a troubleshooter in all Shape manufacturing areas.



Energy management components manufactured by Shape Corp. can be found in many locations throughout a car.

"Plus, I can spend more of my shift ensuring that the machinery we have [taken delivery on] works as expected before we officially put it into production," added Griffes.

While Griffes has been pleased by the MSC vending machine, he has also been more than satisfied with MSC's vending service.

"MSC assigned us a vending specialist, Matt Dutkiewicz, who works closely with our local MSC rep, Lola Brophy. This tandem regularly visits together to ensure our machine is functioning as expected and that the tooling drawers are loaded with the best MSC brands that will deliver optimum performance for whatever it is we are set to machine."

The total package shapes up to be a true symbiotic relationship: Shape delivers on-time, cost-effective, premier custom solutions to its customers. MSC, through its vending dispenser and vast toolbox of metalworking brands, provides the same sort of value and support to Shape Corp. ▼