

## Industry Downturns Are Expansion Opportunity

Founded in 1964, Brown Precision Inc. (Huntsville, AL) has survived and steadily grown by keeping to some traditional principles: quality, integrity, and performance. It has also grown by pursuing the decidedly untraditional approach of aggressively investing in itself during the worst of industry recessions.

“After 9/11, the beginning of one of the manufacturing industry’s biggest downturns was the time of our biggest expansion,” says company president Dan Brown. By late 2002, the company had opened a new 36,000-sq.-ft. facility with additional production space and a new Integrex e-1850V from Mazak.

“We try to differentiate ourselves with each of our customers through exploiting whatever niche we can,” adds Brown. This includes five-axis capability for large and small parts, rapid turnaround, and even personal delivery. It also means outperforming their customers’ capabilities.

For example, one customer, PPG Aerospace, was taking everything that wasn’t a core competency and began outsourcing it to suppliers, including the manufacture of aircraft cockpit window frames. “Although this was a part we already had in the past, we were still able to move from a cycle time of 23

minutes the old way to 12.5 minutes on the e-1850V,” says Shannon Pell, vice president of engineering. “And one special tool does everything, which saves even more time.”

“PPG has been going lean ever since we first knew them seven years ago,” Brown says. “For us, that meant we had to be in a position to make money on short production runs and ship product as the customer needs it. As we expanded, we quickly found the only market in this country is for low-volume, quick-turnaround, order-driven production.”

“It’s all about survival,” he adds. “You have to utilize everything: low-interest money (Brown Precision applied for and received long-term development bonds from the Industrial Development Board of the City of Huntsville, Alabama), multi-tasking equipment, and multi-tasking your employees. If you don’t, you should be looking at selling your company.”



Shannon Pell (left) and Dan Brown of Brown Precision Inc. (Huntsville, AL).



Multi-tasking equipment such as the Integrex e-1850V and multi-tasking employees is part of the survival strategy for Brown Precision Inc.



Polished to a mirror finish, this rack of window frames awaits shipping.