

Living the American Dream

Linh Nguyen, president of Matrix Systems (Ashland, VA) knows about survival. He left his native Vietnam in 1988, living in a refugee camp in Malaysia before making it to the United States in late 1989 with only a \$20 bill in his pocket. Working two jobs, he attended trade school at night, earning a machinist's certificate in 1993. At the same time, he was helping his sister-in-law start and run a restaurant, but the venture closed two years later. "We were working hard and still failed," he relates. "The two reasons why were lack of management and lack of knowledge about the restaurant business."

From 1993 to 1998, Nguyen worked for various machine shops while pursuing an engineering degree. "I helped a friend start his own shop and helped purchase their first CNC turning center, a Mazak Quick Turn 20."

By August 2001, with his engineering degree, Nguyen began preparing to go out on his own. "Most start-ups fail within three years, so I took my time analyzing my business model and market," he says. Used start-up milling machines were his first purchases in 2003, and by April 2004, he added a Nexus QTN 200 CNC

turning center to meet increasing demand. Nguyen added a surface grinder in October 2004, and by December he was swamped with orders. “That’s when the Nexus VCN 510C vertical machining center came to my company.”

Naming his company Matrix Systems, Nguyen runs a full-service job shop supplying short-run parts to customers in the packaging equipment, pharmaceutical, and custom machine design businesses. With a total of five employees, he sees himself in a good position for success.

“Many companies supplying equipment can offer a good machine at a competitive price, but in my experience, I’ve seen companies with Mazak machines with years of service still able to receive spare parts the next day,” he says. “As a small company delivering on very tight time frames, we cannot afford any downtime or long setups. I chose Mazak because their machine and service performance meets our needs.”

“We’re always learning, creating, and improving our skills,” he adds. “Low-range machines started our business, but high-performance machines keep us competitive.”



Linh Nguyen (center) and Matrix Systems employees and a customer pose in front of their new Nexus VCN-510C vertical machining center.



Efficient setups and quick turnaround are essential to Nguyen's success. Here three jobs are set up in the Nexus VCN-510C.



Matrix Systems supplies complex parts in short runs, such as this roller guide for a custom packaging machine.