



MATTHEW KIRCHNER

President/CEO of
America's Best Quality Coatings
kirchner@abqc-usa.com

Surface Finishing Management Myths

Surface Finishing Management Myth:

(sûr'fîs 'fi-nîshî[ng] mæn'ij-mənt 'mîth) *n.*

1. A belief, not supported by reality, existing in the imagination of certain individuals charged with the oversight of all or part of an operation engaging in the practice of coating parts manufactured by another department or company. 2. A practice which, if eradicated, will improve the productivity, customer service and profitability of a surface finishing operation.

Examples:

It's the Substrate: Meaning no offense to our industry's hardworking technical people without whom no finishing business could function, there are times that I am convinced that the first entry in the finishing techie's secret playbook is "Blame the Customer's Part First and Hope Nobody Asks Any More Questions." To be sure, substrates play an important role in a quality finishing job, but how many times have you heard someone blame the part, only to find out that the real problem rested with the process, machine, people or method?

Mona Lisa: The presupposition that because a few parts out of one hundred samples look perfect coming off the line, the process will be able to repeat the "Mona Lisa" part time and again at a reasonable cost. It usually manifests itself like this. The sales rep brings 100 samples to production and vaguely explains what the part should look like once coated. The samples are completed, and the 2 or 3 "closest-to-perfect" parts are selected and presented to the customer. The customer holds the samples in safe keeping and places the order. The production order is completed and, low and behold, only 2-3% of the order looks like the samples delivered to the customer. If the finisher is lucky, he might be able to refine the process enough to improve the yield. If not, someone must return to the customer and explain why their expectation (set in the first place by the finisher with the 2 or 3 samples) cannot be met.

The Customers Will Come Back: Following the cataclysmic burst of the dot com/telecom bubble earlier this decade, many finishers who had built their businesses around coating enclosures, channels and other components used in telecom equipment were left with a huge void in their revenue stream. Many

of them assured themselves that the downturn was only temporary and that it was only a matter of time before the volume returned. What they found was that in today's ultra-competitive environment, new business only comes to those with a proactive growth strategy that is well defined and solidly executed. We all know of finishers who waited themselves right out of business.

If It Works on Paper, It Will Work on the Floor: A key account expedites a 20,000 unit order at the end of first shift. They absolutely, positively must have it by 11:00 p.m. to start production first thing the following morning. Some genius from the front office goes through the logic. 60 parts per rack, 42 racks per hour, 8 hours on second shift, in theory it can be done and the commitment is made. This logic assumes, of course, that 100% of the parts will be conforming, that the line will not go down even for an instant, that no other customer's parts must be run and so on. In theory it can be done and every once in awhile everything runs exactly according to plan. Every once in awhile. This myth is a close cousin of "If it works in the lab, it will work on the line."

It is Impossible to Meet Environmental Standards and Still Make Money: I use this real life example with potential customers regularly. A sales prospect I had been pursuing for about three years called me in a panic about 30 month ago. Their metal finisher had been shut down "suddenly" by its POTW. The prospect's largest customer, a Fortune 500 company, was expediting several orders and was in danger of going line down without the parts. You don't need me to tell you that for a contract manufacturer, shutting a customer's line down can become a very expensive proposition. Trouble was, the prospect had no backup plan. Fortunately they were able to get the parts off of their former finisher's dock and into our plant in time for us to push the orders through and get the parts to their customer. Yes, we still have this account. Not only is it possible to meet environmental standards and still make money—in the long term it is the only way to make money.

The Customer Won't Pay for Quality: The finishers who are convinced of this myth just hasn't found a way to demonstrate to their customer the high cost associated with using a finisher that cannot consistently deliver quality parts. Assuming your operation can deliver consistent quality and your competitor's cannot, you are likely providing your customer an overall cost savings, even if your piece price is higher. Educate your customer in this regard and you will command a higher price.