

MISCO Speaker Company Amplifies Growth

On the eve of its 65th year in business, MISCO Speaker Company's lean efforts are helping sales grow faster than ever.

Minneapolis-based manufacturer MISCO Speaker Company may be nearing senior citizen status, but retirement is nowhere in sight.

"We're forecasting a 15-20 percent sales growth this year. I see us doubling or tripling over the next five to 10 years," says MISCO President Dan Digre.

In the past 12 months, MISCO employees have torn down and rebuilt the company's entire organizational structure, rewritten its job descriptions, corrected bottlenecks in its production processes and added four new people in management-level functions. The catalyst? International competition.

"Lean is essential for maintaining value," Digre says. "It's not enough to just say, 'we're an American company, buy from us.' You still have to have a superior product, and you have to offer the benefits of high quality, competitive pricing and quick delivery."

As one of just a few speaker manufacturers left in the U.S., MISCO is indeed a rarity. Founded in 1949 as Minneapolis Speaker Company, MISCO has grown from its radio and television speaker roots, establishing a reputation for providing custom audio solutions to a diverse array of industries. The company manufactures speakers for commercial jet cabins, medical equipment, and the gaming industry's newest casino games, among many other applications. If you've ever attended a Carlos Santana concert or Cirque du Soleil production, you've heard MISCO's pro-audio speakers in action.

Digre says focusing on custom work has differentiated the company from its largely international competition base. "Loudspeakers can be churned out by the bazillions by foreign companies, so we have to look at where we can apply knowledge towards solving audio problems for other companies," he says.

But to keep its competitive edge, MISCO has turned to lean. First, company management assessed MISCO's current organizational structure, and then rearranged it according to individual employees' skills and strengths. Some employees have added responsibilities, and some have moved into new positions. MISCO has also added to its staff roster.

Next, the company worked to rewrite every job description in collaboration with employees.

"We looked at each business function and then sat down with the people who were in that function to determine whether the existing written descriptions were current," Digre says.



PHOTOGRAPH BY PATRICK KELLY

MISCO Engineering Technician Chai Thao and President Dan Digre put the finishing touches on a MISCO custom speaker.

They also studied how processes flow within and between departments to identify bottlenecks. When they found engineers were spending too much time completing required documentation, they hired a document control person to ensure a smooth and efficient transition between engineering and manufacturing, leaving engineers more time to develop product. Discovery of additional bottlenecks has led to the addition of three more positions as well, including a new operations manager, sales manager and customer relations manager.

Next on MISCO's lean horizon is ISO 9001 certification, which Digre anticipates will help the company to retain and grow its aerospace customer base. The aerospace industry is fast embracing ISO certification, and more and more aerospace companies are requiring it of their vendors. Digre says MISCO will work to ensure the certification process not only caters to its customers, but also builds upon the process improvements it has implemented to date. "We're going to do it in a way that preserves what has made us successful thus far," he says. ■

 For more information about MISCO Speaker Company, go to www.miscospeakers.com.