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Polymeric's thrives with personal touch

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CUYAHOGA FALLS, Ohio—While the giants in the industry keep growing, one small custom mixer is content to stay true to its roots.

Officials at Polymeric's Inc., which has been in the Sample family since it opened in 1972, say the company's size and pedigree, as well as its ability to work directly with customers, continue to be its recipe for success.

"A lot of the times when we're out in the field, we hear customers tell us they appreciate that we still are a privately owned company," said Sales Manager Timmy Samples, who represents the third generation of his family to work in the business. His father, Tim, became CEO of the company in 2011, while his grandfather, Charles, founded the operation.

As some of the smaller mixers disappear—Hexpol A.B. has made several acquisitions over the past few years, including Kardoes Rubber Co. and Portage Precision Polymers Inc.—the younger Samples said customers tell him they are "relieved" that Polymeric's continues to be family-owned. "That sets us apart," he said.

"Just last month, we met with a customer in North Carolina," he said. "He said to us his company would rather deal with a small operation, and that they needed a personal touch. We represent that."

"The heard is thinning," said Jeff Topliff, purchasing director. "With all the big corporate stuff that has been in the works, we still do some things on a handshake."

Once that handshake has been made, executives say the real work begins.

"We've got to be nimble and be able to turn orders around quickly," said Troy Smith, plant manager at the firm's Cuyahoga Falls facility. "Quite frankly, we've got to be good at reacting to our orders and expediting the product. That is our

strength."

As a result, the elder Samples said the company has become more successful, with sales not only increasing 5 to 10 percent each of the last few years, but it also has become more diversified.

While automotive continues to be important, Samples said his company has increased its business in other sectors including agriculture, oil and gas, new construction, and coated fabrics.

"We're branching out into different polymers," said Technical Director Nicki Hershberger. "We're not necessarily into new markets but higher-end parts in those markets. With our variety of lab mixers, we have the ability to mix it here very quickly, do our own testing, making prototypes and share those with the customers."

Improvements continue

Polymeric's has invested \$1.2 million to improve its two Ohio facilities. Those improvements include a newly rebuilt No. 9 drop door mixer on the black mixing line; improved, environmentally friendly lighting; and a new dust collector.

Each plant also was upgraded. Improvements at the 56,000-sq.-ft. Cuyahoga Falls plant include:

- An upgraded research and development lab to improve processes, increase capabilities and streamline the operation;
- A new office computer system to help organize and track R&D projects and make quoting, sales and production more efficient;
- An upgraded computer control processing system for improved traceability; and
- New lab testing software and new lab mixer that has increased development capabilities.

Meanwhile, among the changes at the 36,000-sq.-ft. Kent, Ohio, facility, which produces blends, dispersions and preweighs, are:

- A heavier, safer compounding table;



Polymeric's has put in a newly rebuilt No. 9 drop door mixing machine.

- Upgraded heaters and scale controllers, making the shop more comfortable for employees and the equipment more consistent on all of the bagging lines;

- Upgraded motors on the mixer for a better dispersion and product; and

- A new 55-gallon drum hotbox for better oil processing and improving cycle times and a scale for the forklift truck to check incoming raw materials.

The work force of 80 has enjoyed the fruits of Polymeric's success, according to Timmy Samples, as pay raises, a profit-sharing plan, employee recognition program, increased cross-training and overall improved communication has been implemented.

For the second straight year, Polymeric's will host a rubber compounding course, in conjunction with the ACS Rubber Division. This year's course is May 12-15, as Polymeric's continues its push for new opportunities.

The challenges, company officials said, will be to meet regulations of REACH—

Registration, Evaluation, Authorization and Restriction of Chemicals—that have been implemented in Europe. Officials believe those regulations soon could reach North America.

"As compounders become more global, we have to react to stricter regulations across the world," said Kimberly Marquis, operations manager at the Kent facility. "We have to become more of a technical company, more so than 10 or 15 years ago. We must deal with these new regulations."

As the plants near 100 percent capacity, Tim Samples said he continues to make plans for a new facility, which he said will be constructed in about three years, somewhere in Northeast Ohio.

"We're on schedule for that," said the younger Samples, who rejoined the firm a year ago. "I'm really excited about 2015. We've set a lot of goals, and we're slowly watching them come to fruition."