

Fast & FLEXIBLE

Centria carves a niche in the industry with quick, custom orders

BY ABBE MILLER

For anyone in the coil coating industry, it's only natural to gravitate toward appliance white. After all, in 2008, shipments for white goods reached more than 68 million units. And that was in a down year. Running coil after coil of the same coating is a good problem to have.

But not everyone who has steel or aluminum to coat is making white refrigerators. That's how Centria, Moon Township, Pa., found its niche.

Centria has been on the coil coating scene for more than 40 years, and with that experience, the company's coil coating division in Ambridge, Pa., and Cambridge, Ohio, gained expertise in switching from one paint system to the next in no time flat. Quite frankly, its employees probably wouldn't be half as happy on the job if they were producing the same thing day in and day out.

Regardless of the type of coating or the application, it's tough to do business in an arena where everyone's duking it out for the next customer. And it's especially difficult

when one company can't be distinguished from the next. When there are dozens of businesses that do exactly the same thing, it's hard to stand out in a crowd. Pinpointing an underserved need and focusing on it is one of the few ways for a company to make a name for itself, and it's especially important in a well-established industry.

Finding a niche allows a company to define its strengths and focus on improving its capabilities to meet customers' needs.

And Centria can cater to just about any customer—and can do it on the fly. Whether it's a large order or a small one, the turnaround time is minimal. And the complexity of the coating isn't an issue, either. Centria maintains a tight relationship with its coating suppliers to match any color requirements or create new ones, if necessary.

"We offer the flexibility of shorter lead times and smaller runs," says Jim Dockey, Centria's director of sales and marketing. "That's played particularly well in the effort for everyone to further reduce their inventories. An example of when this comes

into play is when a customer receives its material late from the mill and is forced to play catch-up. Our flexibility helps them, in many cases, make up for lost time."

And as everyone knows too well, time is money. For a potential customer with a focused need, Centria's niche in the business narrows the search. The dozens of calls required to discover whether a company can provide that not-so-typical coating in that just-in-time manner is eliminated.

Speedy delivery

If flexibility is Centria's niche in the market, then the laundry list of materials and substrates it can handle is its proof. The company can coat steel in gauges from 0.009 inch to 0.079 inch and in widths from 18 inches to 62.5 inches. And it can handle aluminum from 0.017 inch to 0.08 inch in widths from 18 inches to 62.5 inches, as well.

As for substrates, aluminum, carbon steel, galvanized steel, Galvalume, stainless steel and zinc-aluminum alloys are no problem.

Dimensional Metals Inc., Reynoldsburg, Ohio, relies on Centria to coat both steel and aluminum. The company provides architectural roofing and siding panels for the construction industry, which are used in shopping centers, office buildings, banks, restaurants and schools. Dimensional Metals is also providing its panels systems to several military bases.

Steve Wissman, CEO at Dimensional Metals, says Centria provides the company with Kynar finishes and also embosses material when needed. Centria will work with a company to develop coatings for a variety of one-sided, two-sided or multilayer coating systems, which can include acrylic, silicone polyester, epoxy, vinyl, fluoropolymer, metallic fluoropolymer, plastisol, urethane, and manual- and solution-strippable films.

"We started using Centria to do some of our coil coating about 15 years ago," says Wissman. "Our business has grown substantially since then, as has Centria's. Our growth has mirrored one another in a lot of ways. We decided to use Centria as our primary painter and coil coater not only because they could do smaller paint runs but because we wanted to go to market a little bit differently. We wanted quicker turnaround times, and Centria was the only company that would provide what we needed."

To discover the most mutually beneficial arrangement for all involved, the folks at Centria and Dimensional Metals got together to discuss a game plan.

"The fact that we really have a partnership is probably one of the best things for us," says Wissman. "They were able to guarantee paint run times so that we could tightly manage our inventories and get material turned around quickly. They asked some things of us, too, like getting our material up off of the floor right away and things like that, which we do. In every sense of the word, it's a true partnership."

Quick quality

For Midwest Metals Corp., Louisville, Ky., and all of Centria's customers for that matter, quick turnaround times are essential—but so is unmatched quality.



Centria is able to supply customers with metallics and high-gloss items, which can be difficult to produce. Historically, these coatings have been known to magnify imperfections in the material.

"If the quality is lacking, it doesn't matter how fast the material is coated," says Cameron Clark, manager of coil sales at Midwest Metals. "We supply metallics as well as high-gloss items, which are difficult to coat. The high gloss in both [coatings] magnifies any imperfections. While short lead times for these items are definitely an advantage, it's Centria's level of quality that's most important."

Midwest Metals warehouses a variety of metals and ships them throughout the United States. In particular, the company is able to supply fabricators and manufacturers with painted aluminum coil in whatever order size a customer may need.

"In today's environment, customers are hesitant to inventory material, so it's crucial that all orders have the highest quality, which is more difficult to achieve with a small order," says Clark. "We work closely with Centria to make sure we have color matches, stocking programs for paint and a large inventory of metal available to serve our customers' needs."

Instantaneous interaction

Epic Metals Corp., Rankin, Pa., is another customer that requires Centria's flexibility and quality. Epic produces roll-formed floor and roof decking for both residential and nonresidential construction projects, such as schools, industrial buildings, airports, dorms, condos and hotels. Centria provides Epic with a two-part polyester coating for its standard products. These are sold as a field ready-to-paint surface, which can be likened to a primer. The coating is applied to galvanized steel coils, which range in gauge from 14 to 22 and go from

24 inches to 53½ inches wide. Centria also has the flexibility to run small batches when Epic's architects need a custom color as a finished coat in polyesters and Kynars.

Frank Vespaziani, purchasing manager at Epic, says Centria's quick turnaround is a major benefit, so much so that it's almost a given. Beyond Centria's consistent reputation, Vespaziani cites the company's Web site as an added bonus.

"It makes it easy for me to see exactly where we are in terms of paint orders, inventory and shipments," he says. "I can do shipping releases from the Web site, and I can get production reports of the paint orders there. When I send them a shipping release, within a minute or two, I get a confirmation of that via e-mail. We do a lot of electronic data exchange, which is so convenient."

The fact that Centria is able to enhance its offerings through its Web site is added proof that the company continues to improve itself with its customers' needs in mind. On paper, Centria's niche can be

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