

## How Woodworkers Improve Productivity: WOOD 100 Strategies for Success

By Karen M. Koenig (/users/karenkoenig) August 28, 2015 | 3:29 pm EDT



### Western Heritage Furniture

Oftentimes thinking outside the box can lead to improved productivity, and help a company gain that all important edge on the competition. Lean & green manufacturing, and investments in R&D, infrastructure and technology, have all played a part in these wood products firms' success. Here's how:

**Western Heritage Furniture, Jerome, AZ** — Owned by Tim McClellan, this small custom furniture shop specializes in using salvaged barnwood to make high-end furniture. But with its rural location, the shop often has to think outside the box for ways to improve productivity and grow sales.

It was by thinking outside the box, that David McClellan, Tim's nephew, developed a proprietary software program for the company that tracks orders from development to production, through delivery and installation, and even inventory. All shop employees have a tablet to track what's happening.

Now, David says, "We don't have to have extra roles for people to do inventory or for people to do purchasing. Using this system eliminates a lot of that redundancy."





Lexington Manufacturing

**Lexington Manufacturing, Coon Rapids (Minneapolis), MN** — Manufacturing to close tolerances and within short lead times is nothing new for this OEM supplier of components for the residential and architectural door markets and more.

The company's ability to lean the production at its two facilities, which combined have more than 300,000-square-feet of manufacturing space, helped spur a 4.1% increase in 2014 sales. "And it won't stop there," says Sales & Marketing Manager Bill DeWitt, as the sustainable manufacturer projects 2015 sales to grow even more. "We're creating a culture of teamwork and continuous improvement," he adds of the company's 170 employees.

Recent investments in technology include a CNC router and an automatic stacking machine, with more purchases planned this year. Its core competencies include CNC machining, drilling, tenoning, planing and profile wrapping of composite panel or solid wood materials.



Northern Contours

**Northern Contours, St. Paul, MN** — Since its founding in 1992, the cabinet components maker has grown steadily "in ambition and breadth of capability," says Lary Skow, president. 2014 was no different, resulting in 7.1% sales growth.

"Our increased productivity is the result of project prioritization and a renewed focus on supply chain management," Skow says. "Streamlining operations has helped us improve our outputs and better serve our customers."

A manufacturer of cabinet doors, drawer fronts, surfaces and other components in a variety of surface materials, the company employs more than 450 people and has five production facilities totaling more than 420,000 square feet.

#### **More Production Specialists:**

##### **Yoder Lumber, Millersburg, OH**

Lean manufacturing and skilled employees are credited with spurring the family-owned component maker's 34.4% sales growth. "Yoder introduced many company-wide lean projects to help reduce unnecessary tasks, standardize process, and sustain us for future growth," says Dennis Hange, marketing manager. "We constantly are cross training our employees and continuing to develop their skill sets as they move into new roles." Yoder also installed a WoodEye and Talon optimization line "to increase our yield and automate our efficiency," upgraded its kilns and added a 6-head Kentwood moulder at its Lumber & Millwork Division.

##### **Stephens & Sons, Loomis, CA**

2014 sales soared 70.5% for the high-end cabinetry and millwork firm. "We added a new CNC router, rip saw and re-saw to boost production," says Chad Stephens, vice president. The company also cross-trained employees "to fill the gaps where needed" while maintaining staff levels.

##### **Cabinet Components Inc., Bessemer, AL**

Improvements in the housing market and a renewed demand for custom cabinets helped the cabinet components manufacturer's sales rise 19.5%. "The addition of drawer box manufacturing capability in 2012 positioned us to grow with the economic recovery," adds Wayne Moore, owner.

##### **Taghkanic Woodworking, Pawling, NY**

The cabinet manufacturer's investment in equipment helped improve productivity, reflected in a sales rise of 19.3%. In addition to a new Greg beaded face-frame hauncher, "In December of 2013 we updated our very old edgebander with a new Felder bander, capable of 3-mil material with radius cutters, scraping and buffing — freeing up several hours a day," says President Leland Thomasset. Perfect timing, as early as this year the firm began producing closet system cabinetry under the DBA of Pawling Closet Co.

##### **California Woodworking, Oxnard, CA**

The cabinet and countertops firm credits lean manufacturing with helping spur a sales growth of 4.3%. "The staff focuses on lean improvement techniques that allow shorter lead times, ease of fabrication and increased profitability," says Luke Vickery, vice president. He adds, "We streamlined our estimating technique which is now directly linked to our CAD/CAM software package which in turn has reduced the amount of time it takes to process a project for manufacturing."

##### **Decorative Panels Intl, Toledo, OH**

An increase in throughput and improved customer service helped the decorative panel manufacturer improve its sales by 2.9% in 2014, notes Timothy R. Boerst, director of Industrial & International Markets.

##### **Huntwood Industries, Liberty Lake, WA**

The cabinet firm opened a door and millwork division, so customers can easily coordinate styles throughout the house.

##### **Indiana Furniture, Jasper, IN**

To improve data flow, the office furniture maker invested in 2020 ERP software which uses object-oriented architecture, making it easier to handle special orders.

**Spencer Cabinetry, Monroe, WA**

The cabinet company attributes its quality and high productivity to the Toyota Production System used at the plant. The firm received the Seattle Business' 2014 Washington Manufacturing Award for its achievements.

**Dovetail Designs & Millwork, Billings, MT**

The custom millwork firm continues to distinguish itself through its quality and service. "Attention to client demands, and an ability to use CNC technology to increase productivity and capabilities in production," are also credited with helping sales grow 7.0%, says President Mark Sevier.

**North American Plywood Corp., Parsippany, NJ**

As well as supplying plywood and related products, the firm also produces components. General Manager Donald Kuser says they invested heavily in equipment and inventory last year, including the purchase of "the largest UV flat line coater in North America." He adds, "We are seeing the benefits with shorter lead times and higher quality products. We also invested in employee training and dust removal equipment for a safer workplace...We feel that a safe workplace will keep us competitive." 2014 sales grew 25.0%.

**Vanguard Furniture, Conover, NC**

Unprecedented growth over the last few years led the casegoods and furniture maker to open its first plant in Virginia, according to Andy Bray, president.

**Menck Windows USA, Chicopee, MA**

Winner of the WMIA Wooden Globe Innovator of the Year award, the European window firm is "producing windows with less than half the manpower typical in custom window and door shops," says Todd Bachelder, CEO. He credits the advanced technology in the shop, primarily Weinig, with Menck's competitive edge.

**Showplace Wood Products, Harrisburg, SD**

The cabinet firm outsources some of its components from suppliers such as Northern Contours, in addition to manufacturing in-house. Already significant, production will grow when a third plant opens. The 60,000-square-foot facility will build full-access, frameless cabinetry.

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## About the Author:



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Karen M. Koenig has more than 25 years of experience in the woodworking industry, including visits to wood products manufacturing facilities throughout North America, Europe and Asia. As Editor-in-Chief of Woodworking Network magazine (formerly Wood & Wood Products), Karen's primary responsibilities include spearheading the writing, editing and coordinating of the editorial content of the publication, along with the Red Book resource guide and the Red Book online source and supply directory. She is also a frequent contributor to other Woodworking Network online and print media. She can be reached at [kkoenig@woodworkingnetwork.com](mailto:kkoenig@woodworkingnetwork.com)