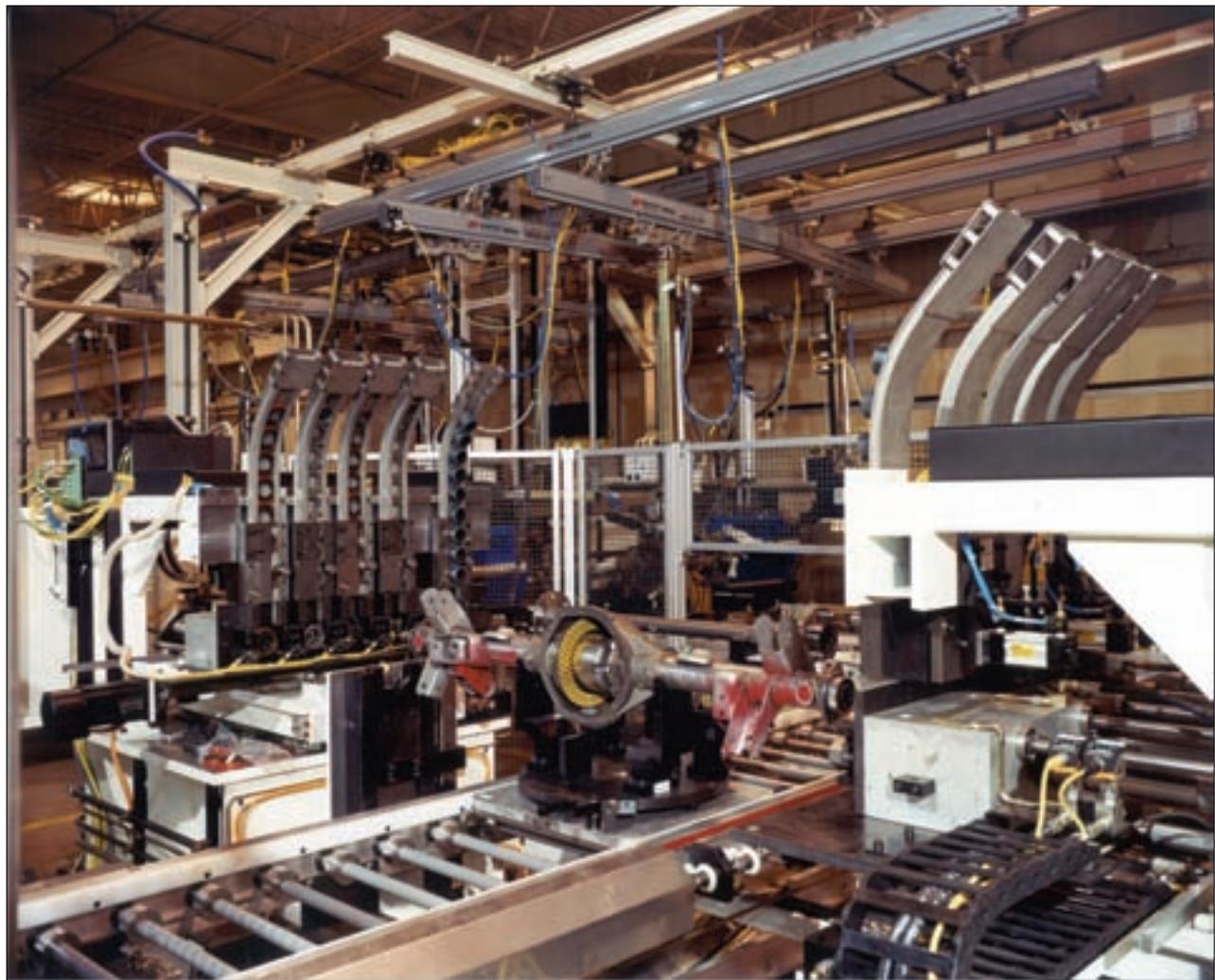


Custom-Made Manufacturing

Sound Business Model Increases Opportunities for Misumi USA, Inc.

Matthew Jaster, Associate Editor



This axle press station by Cincinnati Automation uses a variety of components provided by Misumi USA, Inc.

Cincinnati Automation & Test, a provider of automated assembly and quality testing equipment located in Machesney Park, IL, knows all too well the pressures of meeting the needs of its customers. With a demanding factory floor schedule, the company cannot expect “off-the-shelf” supplies to meet the diverse specifications needs of its various products. Due to customization, this puts many conventional suppliers at a disadvantage.

“If the standard part no longer meets the specification, we need to be adaptable and diligent with costing while reinventing or reworking our previous designs. Compounding this is the need to maintain minimal inventory, faster turnaround on projects and overall cost containment. It all adds up to quite a challenge,” says Noel Nichols, director of standards and development at Cincinnati Automation & Test.

Though Cincinnati Automation has an assortment of standard equipment modules such as conveyors and material handling devices, the core of its business comes from special automation systems for the assembly of light- and heavy-duty finished products. These systems typically have components that must be configured and adjusted for each application.

“We rely heavily on our supplier base for the production of components, allowing us to focus on our core strengths of engineering and system integration. Once our design solution is established, we have a regimented system of part supply and procurement,” Nichols says. “Engineering identifies the part, such as a shaft, collar, roller switch assembly, structural section, motor or bracket, and then procurement places the orders. We emphasize the functionality of the part, the price and the delivery schedule.”

According to Nichols, cost is minimal during the initial design stage. As the design takes shape on the factory floor, however, the cost rises dramatically. Should a part be out of spec, late for delivery, or the quantity not exactly what was ordered, the impact becomes more severe, says Nichols. “In the final stages of assembly and system testing, failures become critical.”

Cincinnati Automation finds success in identifying and establishing relationships with unique suppliers for its component needs, and Misumi USA, Inc. fits right into that description. Headquartered in Schaumburg, IL, Misumi has provided various components for Cincinnati Automation for more than six years.

“Since the first products were sold in 2003, the relationship has developed quite nicely,”

says Mike Ricketts, account manager for Misumi. “From an initial six components, Cincinnati Automation & Test now buys over 70 families of products from Misumi. These range from simple washers and linear shafts to locating bushings, circular posts and oil-free bearings.”

This relationship works because Misumi boasts a business model that dovetails effectively with Cincinnati Automation. Ricketts calls the configurable component “a toolbox for the imagination” of a machine designer, and customers have repeatedly stated they can receive finished products from Misumi at less cost than bringing the raw materials into their shops for in-house machining.

“We chose Misumi as a supply partner because they have good quality, prompt delivery and excellent cost advantage for us—these factors contribute significantly to our customers’ satisfaction. Often we buy parts in small quantities, and with most suppliers there are cost issues, right from the start. In working closely with Misumi, we quickly realized there were cost and quality advantages to their standard components,” Nichols says.

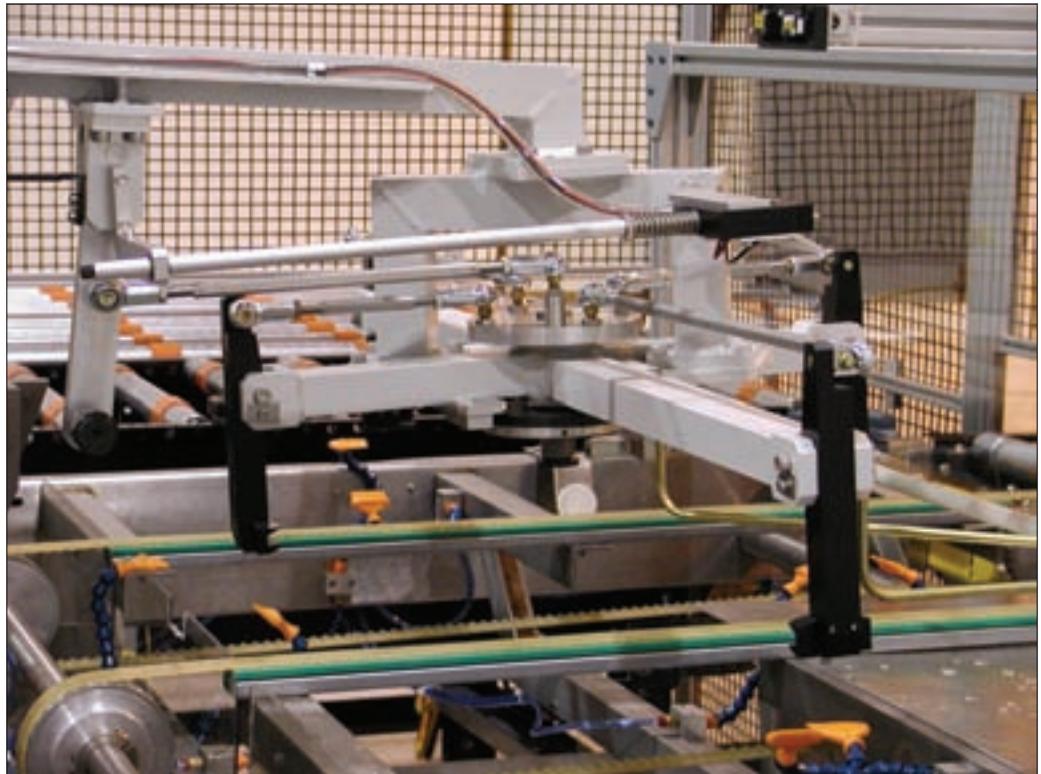
According to Ricketts, Misumi’s customer base is oftentimes building one-off machines for dedicated operations. In numerous cases, a custom machine is being built with 100 percent Misumi content. Subsequently, when the customer gets reorders or chooses to take the machine to general production, considerable carrying and inventory costs are saved through its unique shipment policy where all the components arrive before the machine enters the assembly phase.

Misumi’s delivery system allowed small and large lots of parts at Cincinnati Automation, whether standard or configured, to arrive on the assembly floor at the optimum time for the machine build schedule. In the overall cost picture described by Nichols, this was a dealmaker, as it complements Cincinnati Automation & Test’s VMI (Vendor Managed Inventory) strategy.

Cincinnati Automation originally sourced a local machine shop for an anti-backup latch for their conveyor systems, but soon realized they could configure and purchase the part directly from Misumi and save time and money.

“Another differentiator is that Misumi has a CAD configurator that allows our engineers to configure a part, download the native CAD file, modify the file and then insert the file into our CAD assembly, thereby saving substantial time

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Misumi supplied this gripper mechanism with custom-configured parts for Cincinnati Automation, helping the company enhance their status as a key component supplier.

and cost in the design phase," Nichols says.

Solidworks and *AutoCAD* programs are primarily used in designing Cincinnati Automation products and these programs are resident in the Misumi CAD Configurator, thus allowing Cincinnati Automation to easily import the native files into their assemblies.

"Oftentimes, a customer requires a unique product solution for a particular job and we find that it also provides a solution for many other customers with similar applications. After working through any proprietary design issues, we offer such products through our catalog to achieve cost advantages by producing in higher volumes," says Chris Blaszczyk, manager of product development for the automation components division at Misumi. "Working in synergy with our customers yields superior results for everyone. We're quite pleased about the relationship we have with Cincinnati Automation & Test and believe that is has helped to create a new industry standard."

Another strong selling point is Misumi's aggressive ad and public relations campaign. The company markets specifically to machine designers and automation builders in hundreds of relevant media sources, both print and online. The company also participates in numerous trade shows and conducts its own Configuration

Technical Seminar series across the country in an effort to court new business opportunities.

At the end of the day, however, it's project management at Misumi and Cincinnati Automation that has benefitted both companies moving forward.

"Overall project management is founded on the triangle of quality, price and delivery," Nichols says. "The old business maxim that you can only have two of those things simply doesn't work in today's business environment. We can and we must have all three, working in concert to support our unique machine build requirements, or the supplier is simply off our team." 

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