

Profiles of Success #1

Two fabrication shops.
Two different punch
tooling systems

BY MARY SCIANNA

If you're exploring your punch tooling options, these profiles of two metal fabrication shops and their experiences with different tooling designs from two suppliers may provide some insight into the best selection for your business.

FABRICATION COMPANY:
Define Metal Fabrication Inc.

PUNCH TOOLING:
Wilson Tool HPX toolholders
with EXP thick turret tooling



Michael Grieger selected Wilson Tool's thick turret tooling system, the HPX toolholder with quick-change EXP punches, because he liked that he could use the same toolholder for multiple punches instead of having to purchase full assemblies for each job.

When Michael Grieger set up his metal fabrication shop in 2011 in Toronto, ON, Define Metal Fabrication, during the tail end of the recession, little did he know that many of his business decisions would emulate scenarios his former boss faced in the mid-1990s.

The most recent example is the decision to select punch tooling for a new all electric Accurpress turret punch press, the AccurMax Ultra.

“It’s ironic because with every decision I’ve made, I have been largely emulating my former employer who I cut my teeth with. So back in the 1990s, he had upgraded to a Finn Power turret punch press [now known as Prima Power] and he was faced with the same decision about which punch tooling to use with the machine.”

At that time, the decision was simpler, says Grieger, because one supplier had thick turret tooling and another supplier had Nova tooling. “Today’s it’s more complicated because the tooling manufacturers we looked at make both types of tooling and in fact, the sales person for Wilson Tool back in the 1990s, was the same sales rep I was dealing with



Define Metal recently expanded, in part to accommodate the new all electric Accurpress punch press turret it purchased, which uses the Wilson Tool punch tooling. Grieger says Define Metal is the first in Canada with this machine, according to his equipment supplier, J&R Service and Sales.

[Roy Payne].”

Ultimately, Grieger went with thick turret tooling system from Wilson Tool, the HPX toolholder system with quick-change EXP punches and push-in stripper plates. The system allows fabricators to use the same toolholder for multiple punches rather than purchasing full assemblies for each job.

“Back in the 90s with my former employer, we used Nova style tooling so I had never used thick turret tooling. Now that I’ve used both styles, thick turret tooling is probably one of the most robust styles of tooling. They’re well guided and in conjunction with advancements Wilson Tool has made, this punch tooling lasts a long time.”

Grieger says punch tooling manufacturers have made “phenomenal” improvements with their offerings.

“I can create a part that almost looks like a laser cut part by using the right punch tools. Even the punches are better. It used to be you would

have a large piece of steel and when grind life had been exhausted on a piece of tooling, you’d throw that whole body out and that’s changed. Now it’s just a tip or an insert made from powdered metal [Ultima powdered tool steel] and it’s a lot less expensive to replace just the tip rather than the whole body.”

Investing in new technology and people has resulted in modest but steady growth. “We’re manufacturing products for US customers and we’re competitive.”

Punch tooling life is also much improved, adds Grieger.

“It used to be you’d get 500,000 hits from a tool without having to sharpen it and now it’s one million or two million hits before you need to re-sharpen. Grind life has increased significantly; the life is almost double with some tooling.”

Asked what he likes best about the Wilson Tool punch tooling and Grieger says it’s a combination of technology and quality of service.

“With the HPX system, the initial toolholder is more expensive, however the punch inserts used with the holders are much less expensive due to their smaller size, which use less material and labour [to make them].”

As for service, Grieger says with Wilson Tool’s facility just around the corner from his shop and Roy’s extensive “due diligence” prior to selecting the tooling are good indicators that Wilson Tool will be able to respond to service needs quickly.

Grieger faced a lot of skepticism from friends and family when he



The HPX toolholder system with quick change EXP punches and push-in stripper plates from Wilson is an effective way to improve punching efficiencies, says Define Metal's Michael Grieger.

decided to form Define Metal in 2011, but he's never looked back. His philosophy of investing continually in the business via new technology and people has resulted in modest, but steady growth with manufacturers primarily in the retail store fixtures and displays market in Canada and the US.

"We're manufacturing products for US customers and we're able to be competitive. One of our customers manufactures vertical landscaping products and this company wants to build the business in the Canadian marketplace so consumers here won't have to deal with the exchange rate. We've been working with the customer for two years now and we're looking forward to working with this customer, especially now with the horticulture industry ready to take off because of legislation to make cannabis legal."

Define Metal's shop, which is just short of 930 sq ft (10,000 sq ft), employs eight to ten people, including a TIG

welder from Syria.

"I was desperate for a qualified TIG welder. One of my colleagues who runs an autobody shop had sponsored a few families from Syria and he heard I was looking for a welder and it turned out one of those members was a welder and he's been with us for over a year now."

The company recently expanded into the next bay at its current facility, in part to accommodate the new Accurpress punch press turret. Grieger says Define Metal is the first in Canada with this machine, which he purchased through fabricating equipment distributor, J&R Service and Sales, based in Markham, ON. In addition to two CNC turret punch presses, the shop house two CNC press brakes and a full array of MIG, TIG and spot welding equipment. As part of the services it offers its customers, Define Metal also performs grinding and polishing, particularly for customers in the retail

store fixtures market.

Grieger says he would like to expand his business by diversifying into new markets—the shop recently landed a job to remanufacture new doors for GO Trains that are being rebuilt—and purchasing new equipment, such as a laser cutting machine.

As for the next stage in his career, he is thinking about creating a metal fabricating teaching facility to address the shortage of skilled workers.

"This industry has been very good to me and I live and breath it. I had an opportunity to do some part time teaching at Durham College and really enjoyed it. I'm thinking the next step is to become a teaching facility as a sideline. We'll see." SMT

www.definemetal.ca
www.wilsontool.com