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Alcan-Pechiney

Getting it right the second time

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Amerimax

The “experienced rookie” brings flexibility to the coil coating industry. Service, expertise are keys.

By Michelle Martinez, Editor-in-Chief

Amerimax Building Products is what you might call an experienced rookie in the coil coating industry. The Plano, Texas-based fabricator's parent company, Euramax, has coated metal in Europe for almost half a century and boasts one of only three 102-in. coating lines in the world. Its former parent, Alumax, which spun off the fabricated products division in the late 1990s, had supplied coated products in the U.S. as well. Still, until a couple of years ago, Amerimax's reputation as a coil coater had been predominantly an in-house secret.

“We've put a lot of effort into developing our talent in coil coating,” said Scott Anderson, president of Amerimax Building Products. The company has focused on specialty-coated products such as precision painted graphics and customized color matches that require high-end customer service and flexibility. “We choose to stay on the edge,” Anderson declared. “We do that on purpose because that is what we're good at. We're selective—we don't sell to everybody; we're looking for specialty.”

Coil coating debut

Amerimax is a major supplier to the recreational vehicle and manufactured housing industries, and for years it fed its 10 different manufacturing locations through Alumax paint lines. After the transition, the company retained a 56-in. paint line and a specialty 36-in. line in Anaheim, California. Amerimax moved the wider line to Helena, Arkansas, “initially to get control of our supply line,” Anderson related. But as time went on, he indicated, the company invested close to \$2 million in improvements to its operations and, combined with available capacity from changing market dynamics, the opportunity became obvious.

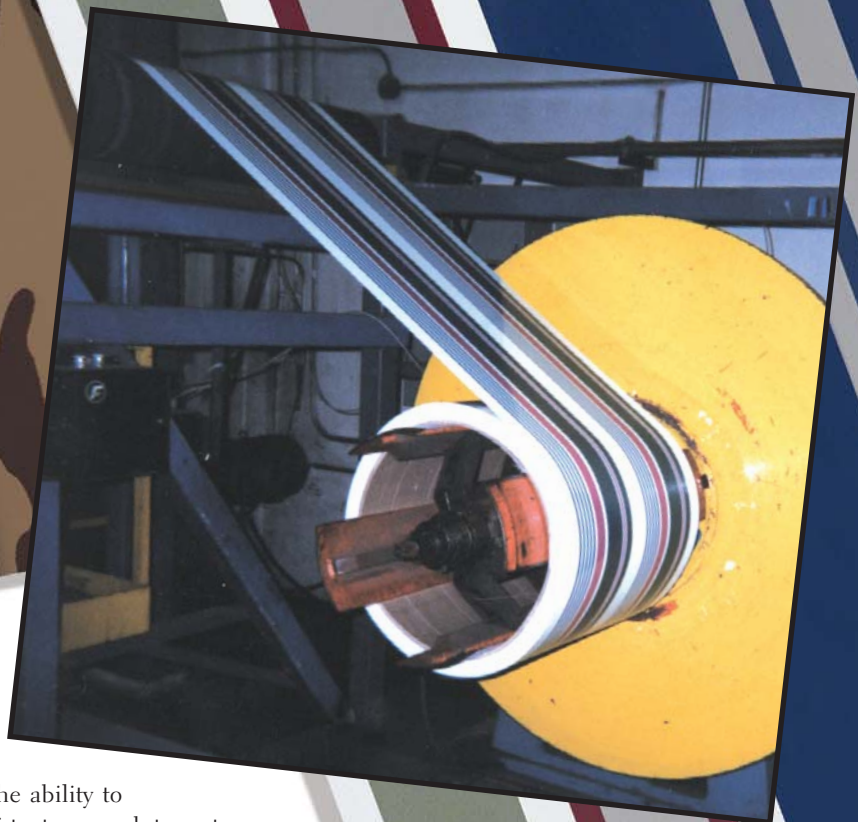


“For years we've known that we've had a gem in Anaheim, California,” Anderson said. The line can paint two- and three-color stripes that the recreational vehicle industry has used for more than a decade, added Bob Guzinsky, sales and marketing director at Amerimax, and this line will likely benefit other markets as well.

The signature blue and yellow awning that covers the drive-ins of the Sonic fast-food chain is a recent example. The awning used to be constructed of two separate painted metal panels that would then be fabricated and formed into one piece. Amerimax custom matched the restaurant chain's colors, coil coated the two-stripe aluminum and eliminated several post-paint fabricating operations.

“Our requirements internally are as high as anybody's externally. That's a key point,” Anderson said. Amerimax is

finds its niche



into the business as a coater, full time, he asserted, and not because of excess capacity. "This is a line of business for us," he said. "We have something of value to offer."

Amerimax supplies its own internal painted coil requirements, which make the company one of its own largest customers and afford the ability to rationalize production capacity, and take a consistent approach to customers. "Flexibility and keen order management are a part of what Amerimax brings to the table," Anderson said. The company can accurately forecast its needs, and efficiently manage external orders to meet customer expectations.

coil coating

Ramping up slowly also gave Amerimax insight into how to manage the coating division. "It was just like starting a new business," Guzinsky observed. "It's been a learning process." If the company overextended itself by overselling, there was a risk of disappointing customers—both internal and external, Guzinsky suggested. The slow buildup has allowed the company to understand where it fits in the marketplace.

Service is key

Amerimax is quite familiar with the sometimes extensive wish lists of fabricators. It performs the same functions in its own facilities and has supplied manufacturers for decades. It's no wonder, then, that the coil coating division's first external customers were in the industries that the company knew best—building and construction, and portable structure-type businesses.

"We've been supplying them for years," Anderson said. "We knew what they needed and wanted. In fact, we used to spec for them."

Despite an industry preoccupied by price, Guzinsky related, knowledge of the downstream process is an important differentiator. Just ask Lesa Moore. The aluminum products manager for Phoenix Metals, a wholly owned subsidiary of Reliance Steel & Aluminum Co., commented that about 12 percent of what Phoenix sources is coated aluminum. Ninety-nine percent of that, she said, is provided by Amerimax. "Your inside contact can make or break you," Moore noted, "and their customer service is really top-notch."

Amerimax has assisted Phoenix's customers with formulating paints on certain projects, Moore said, and on others, partnered with a paint vendor to produce a specific end product more efficiently. "They dug in and got it fixed," she said. "They're hands-on, and that really counts."

"If it's all about pounds, then it's [the larger integrated mills]," commented Roy Davis, marketing manager for Amerimax. "But when it comes down to a specific customer need, a niche, a specialty—that's when we can say, here's the value-added that we can give."

Amerimax can

source from

Euramax facilities as well, a bonus for customers seeking high-end materials such as those used in the appliance industry. And in unique cases, Guzinsky related, the company can network with its fabricating and roll forming divisions to deliver a finished component. "Our challenge is to go out there and actively talk through these issues with our customers," Davis said. "We try to bring it all together for them, and that's the path we're going down."

Amerimax has doubled its coated products sales to outside customers year-over-year, Anderson said, and significant interest is brewing in Mexico and throughout the U.S. The company sees future promise in innovative products it developed for niche industries as well.

The company's StarBrite, a light-gauge polished aluminum with an embossed tread plate finish, is a lighter-weight alternative to tread plate for a variety of applications, the company said. And its MaxxBrite, a highly reflective channel letter coil, is a potential boon to the sign industry. MaxxBrite increases the brightness of signs without the use of extra LED or neon, is more cost and energy efficient and reduces labor and material costs to the end user, the company said. "We educate our customers," Davis said. "We try to bring solutions directly to them." ■

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