

WISCONSIN DENTAL LABORATORY REDUCES LEAD TIME FOR PATIENTS

ABOUT DENTAL CRAFTERS, INC. Dental Crafters' staff of 88 manufactures a full range of dental restoration products including crowns, bridges, fixed and removable dentures, and implant dentistry products in Marshfield, Wisconsin. Dental Crafters and its sister companies, Implant Solutions and Argon Dental, compose the Dental Crafters Network and complement each other to provide not only implant products, but also surgical guides and training seminars for dentists, oral surgeons, and orthodontists throughout the Great Lakes area and nationwide.

THE CHALLENGE. Production bottlenecks and manufacturing issues prompted Dental Crafters Co-owner Robert Slominski to seek a better way to serve dentists and, in turn, patients who rely on dental restoration products the company offers. To support that goal, Dental Crafters reached out to UW-Stout Manufacturing Outreach Center (MOC), a NIST MEP affiliate, for Lean expertise, and thus began a journey of process improvement that's spanned 10 years.

MEP CENTER'S ROLE. MOC and Dental Crafters have worked together to continuously improve and optimize the company's operations for success with a number of Lean projects. At the start, MOC project managers helped Dental Crafters conduct a Value Stream Mapping project and establish Lean concepts with all employees. Then, MOC's Ted Theyerl and Wisconsin MEP's Andy Porter worked together to introduce Dental Crafters to MPX software. The modeling software evaluates various processing scenarios for the company and has proven very effective in optimizing the company's production and throughput, as well as reducing the guesswork of resource planning. Another part of helping Dental Crafters manage their processes is the use of cellular manufacturing, also introduced by MOC. This had tremendous impact on Dental Crafters' lead times, quality, and customer service. Staff work now in one of seven production cells, each team moving a specific product through the process from beginning to end. To ensure Dental Crafters' team has the skills to maintain these improvements, Training Within Industry (TWI), another essential element of Lean, was delivered by Theyerl and Mike Braml of TWI Institute. Supervisors, operators, and cell leaders were shown how to break down jobs into trainable steps and how to instruct others to do the same, ultimately bringing stability and standardization to the process changes they'd achieved. Lean instruction and improvements remain an ongoing process at Dental Crafters. "Once you see the results," concludes Slominski, "it's so easy to want to take it further." Looking back, Slominski sees Dental Crafters' transformation and established success as the result of the company's innovation, investment, and sense of "partnership" with MOC that's been a decade in the making.

"It's one thing to read about a Lean concept; it's another to have someone who acts as a driver, a leader of Lean. UW-Stout MOC was incredible."

-Robert Slominski, Co-Owner

RESULTS



Lead time reduced from 12 days to 4 days



9% annual growth



12% average increase in labor efficiency

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