

NPE business news

Electroform mixes toolmaking, automation

By Rhoda Miel

PLASTICS NEWS STAFF



Electroform President Wade Clark

CHICAGO (June 26, 1 p.m. EDT) -- Electroform Co. Inc. is pushing the boundaries of what people expect from mold makers, and finding a new niche in integrating toolmaking and automation.

The Rockford, Ill.-based company has invested its own time and effort into proving the system works, creating a proprietary tool and automation system with two-shot molding, in-mold decorating and automated assembly of six separate parts, all molded on-site at Progressive Components International Corp.'s NPE display.

"We've done this to show what technology can do," said Electroform President Wade Clark in a June 22 interview at NPE in Chicago. "We know that molds can run fast, but what else can we do?"

Electroform recently launched a business line that looks to integrate tooling with automation and get the best out of both. Toy car production, as demonstrated

on the show floor, is one of three complete programs the company has made so far and shows what the integrated approach is capable of, Clark said.

He came up with the concept in one day; the company spent two weeks designing the tool, seven weeks building it and four weeks developing the integration package. The entire program took 17 weeks to build — and since putting it into production, Clark said the team has found ways to cut 25 percent of the 23-second cycle time.

The mold uses standard components from Wauconda, Ill.-based Progressive, and Electroform uses a standard robot and press. It makes its own proprietary parts as needed but draws much of the processing improvement by designing the tool and automation system together from the start.

"You don't have to deal with two guys," Clark said. "Now you can go to one person for the whole system."

The mold maker has its own fleet of presses and can set up a full prototype test run of the products before it ever goes out to the customer. It recently hired an automation engineer to help develop the program and has been moving into more prototype and development work since opening a research and development center last year.

The company has had two commercial programs launch using its integrated mold-making and automation design so far. It invested its own money into creating the NPE display to demonstrate to other potential customers what is possible.

"We're willing to take the risk out of it for the customer," Clark said. "We're showing them that this works."