



Overview of the Jerames shop floor showing three of the company's four Doosan Puma CNC turning centers. Jerames operates a Puma 240 CNC, two Puma 300s and one Puma 300 with live tooling. In addition, the equipment lineup includes a number of 5- 4- and 3-axis Haas machining centers. Predator DNC is used to communicate with the equipment from a central server. The company currently employs 26 people in a modern new facility.

Building with Better Communication

*A Growing Southern California Job Shop
Believes the Secret to Growth is Better
Communications with Customers.*

*Story and photos by
C. H. Bush, editor*

A famous Irish literary critic and playwright once said, “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” Someone else once said, “What you think you said and what your customer thinks you said may be quite different.”

Seven years go, when Bob Hubble became president of Santee, CA's Jerames Mfg., Inc., he realized that one of the biggest drags on company growth was its inability to clearly communicate with its customers.

“The company had a lot of problems to address,” he says. “Things like a very narrow marketing focus; they essentially produced manufacturing tools and fixtures for aerospace. There was a lack of modern CNC machining equipment, no real quality assurance program, and a company culture that was cast in concrete. But the ability to simply and clearly communicate was certainly one of the biggest problems. There simply was no communication infrastructure.”

With backing from his investors, Hubble immediately set out to address all of those problems, with initial emphasis on two main ones: quality assurance and communication.

“When I took over, Jerames had computers and links to the internet, of course,” he says. “That was really forced on them by our customers. The problem was no one here at the time really knew how to use the system. As a result we did a terrible job communicating.”

“The main problem, as I understand it, was that we

QA manager Randy Anstaett (left) and Jerames president Robert Hubble discuss quality requirements on a new project. In the background is quality analyst Daniella Urrea. CMM is a Mitutoyo Crysta Apex 9168 with 36 x 64 x 32 travel and SP25 special scanning Probe,

couldn't receive clear and detailed information from our customers," explains Gary Sanchez, estimator-planner, who joined the company ten months ago. "The information we were able to get was minimal at best. We couldn't read solid models, for instance. We didn't have the ability to get all the critical dimensions needed to make complex parts. We didn't have a system to give good feedback to our customers. Bob has changed all that since his arrival."

"For one thing, we invested in MasterCAM, Catia and SolidWorks," Hubble says. "Now our people are trained to go to our customers' web sites and take their orders and requirements straight from there. We've trained our people to use the same CAD/CAM software our customers do. We spend \$40,000 a year just on software maintenance programs in order to stay up to date. Our customers are steadily moving forward, and we have keep pace with them or we'll lose out. Our electronic communication system is right in there with the best."

Quality Assurance Program

Hubble knew that if he wanted to increase sales, diversify his markets and keep customers like Boeing, Northrop/Grumman, Hamilton Sunstrand, Honeywell and other companies of that calibre happy, he had to have a highly sophisticated quality program.

"Building a good QA program was really our most important project," he says, "so we took the plunge immediately and spent the next couple of years putting in a world-class QA system. We invested in a Mitutoyo automated CMM, added highly trained quality people, created all the systems needed, and in 2005 we were certified by Moody International to comply with ANSI/ISO/ASQC Q9001:2000 and SAE AS9100B. We're very pleased with the result and with our people."

Hubble says that AS9100B registration is uncommon for facilities the size of Jerames.

"We went all the way and spent the money," he says, "because we don't intend to stay this size for long. We're planning on growing and to do that, you have to get in the game with the big boys. We now do a lot of prime contract work."

Equipping for Growth

In 2003 Jerames was a family-owned business producing manufacturing tools and fixtures using manual equipment and a couple of CNC knee mills. Today the company produces complex machined parts, tooling, and assemblies for the aerospace, defense, medical, and commercial industries. Parts produced include gas turbine and aerospace structural components, as well as titanium surgical implants.

Gary Sanchez, Jerames estimator-planner, examines a part profile on an optical comparator located on the shop floor.



"We began our modernization program in the fall of 2003," Hubble says. "And since then we have totally changed the old company culture, added eager new personnel and re-equipped the entire company to allow us to change direction into a prototype-production-oriented company that can build anything our customers throw our way. We now have long-term contracts with many of our customers. With our modern technology it's now easy for us to communicate with our customer by visiting their internet sites. Our communications have improved tremendously. Basically, if you want to grow, you have to make it easy for our customers to do business with us."

Jerames has, in fact, come a long way from its manual machining days.

"In addition to the Mitutoyo CMM, we have four and five-axis mills, in-house grinding and EDM capability, and six turning centers, four of which are Doosan Pumas," Hubble says. "About 70% of the parts we make start out on a lathe, so getting the right kinds of lathes was very important to us."

The Pumas were bought in response to a new project opportunity that came along, he recalls.

"We had a couple of lathes," he says, "but in 2007 we had a new business opportunity that was going to require extensive turning. The parts were Inconel, M247, and 15-5PH."





Doosan Puma operators Eric Peterson (left) and Tim O'Donnell examined a recently produced part.

We knew we needed rugged equipment that would hold close tolerances and would be very reliable, plus we felt we needed local support, so we went looking.”

Doosan Puma Turning Centers

After meeting with several distributors and sales people, Jerames eventually made contact with Protek, the Doosan representative in Simi Valley, CA.

“We bought one Puma from Jeff Henderson at Protek,” Hubble recalls. “And I have to say, those guys really jumped to give us excellent service. For instance, if we call them at 10 o’clock in the morning, they’re here by one o’clock in the afternoon. They concentrate on Doosan and giving great service. The result is we bought three more systems from them in the next two years.”

Jerames now operates three Puma 300s, one with live tooling and a Puma 240.

“The Doosans are not the lowest-priced turning centers out there,” Hubble says, “but always buying the lowest price can lead to false economy, because sometimes buying cheap leads to real problems. We’re here for the long run, so we bought Pumas. As far as we can tell from our research, these machines will provide years of reliable service. We run them fifty hours a week and they’ve certainly served us well.”

Looking to the Future

Although Jerames has come far from the limping family business Hubble originally took over, he feels it still has a long way to go.

“We’ve had our ups and downs, of course,” he says, “but I think the company will continue to grow. This has always been a tough business, and it’s going to get tougher. Unless a small company is adequately financed, it may not make it. Just complying with the ISO AS100 industry quality requirements takes a tremendous amount of resources. Still, I believe the market is in the process of regaining some strength, so our goal here is first to retain our gains and then move forward with the industries we serve.”

Hubble sees a possible crack in the rush to produce overseas, too.

“We can’t compete with offshore labor rates, but with the equipment we have in this country, our commitment to quality and our rate of productivity, the labor difference becomes less of an issue,” he says. “The truth is that by the time companies send their parts and materials over seas, then get it back to the processor, cost wise they’re better off having somebody like us make the parts. I believe more and more large companies are beginning to realize this, which is good for us and for America.” ■