

Categories

Machine Tools: Cutting
(3,970)

**Machine Tools:
Metalforming, shearing,
folding and punching**
(1,512)

**Machine Tools:
moulding** (1,081)

Cutting tools (1,805)

Welding and Joining
(1,509)

**Finishing, preparation,
coating and painting**
(1,041)

**Automation and
assembly systems**
(1,101)

Manufacturing support
(8,686)

**Industry news,
commerce, exhibitions,
education** (8,254)

Packaging (2,867)

**Specialist
Manufacturing Sectors
and Metals Producing**
(1,334)

Books, CDs and Videos
(198)

**IT for manufacturing
management and
production** (3,167)

**IT for engineering,
industrial and
commercial
applications** (4,850)

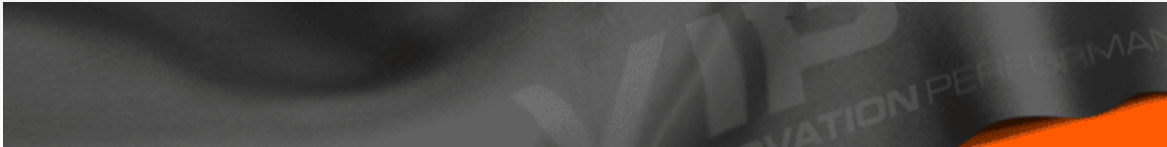
**Manufacturing IT
hardware and
communications** (1,570)

**Used machinery and
machine tools** (30)

**Materials handling and
storage** (942)

**Wood and non-
metallics working** (73)

Metrology instruments



One laser cell replaces two laser profilers

A **Prima Industrie UK**
product story

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Edited by the Manufacturingtalk editorial team **Apr 3, 2008**

An automated laser cutting cell has replaced two existing laser profilers and is giving faster and more accurate profiling, a 'lights out' capability and 40% extra material capacity.

SORB Engineers decided to replace its two existing **laser machines** with a state-of-the-art automated laser cutting cell from Prima Industrie UK.

The result is a customised installation delivering faster and more accurate profiling, as well as a 'lights out' capability and 40% extra material capacity than standard.

Based in Marlow, Buckinghamshire, UK, for the Past 42 years, SORB is a family-run company that specialises in precision sheet metal engineering and fabrication.

It has established a strong reputation for quality and close attention to its customers' requirements, which is why the company's work can be found in the motor sport, medical, IT and communications sectors, in addition to more traditional markets such as machine building, architectural engineering and transportation.

"We pride ourselves on supplying excellent laser cutting and precision sheet metal services," said production manager Andy Proniw.

"It's an approach that has been central to our continued business growth and is the reason we enjoy such a high proportion of repeat business.

By providing a cost-effective and personal service to our customers, we tend to build close relations with many of them over many years".

Versatility, flexibility and fast response are further factors in SORB's success.

The company also offers CNC folding and MIG/TIG welding facilities on site, enabling it to function as a 'one stop shop' for its customers.

Proniw said that the company had first invested in CNC laser cutting equipment in 1994 and later added a second, larger capacity machine from the same supplier in 1999.

Proniw said that the original machine was the first of its type to be installed in the UK and provided a substantial increase in productivity when compared with **punch press** equipment.

The **laser profiler** did not require dedicated tooling and enabled SORB to tackle much more intricate profiling jobs than before.

Its ability to produce high quality work in **shorter lead times** allowed the company to expand its business levels significantly and in turn, led to the justification of the second machine.

Proniw said: "A further nine years down the line and it was apparent that laser cutting

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technology had moved on - not only in **cutting speed** and precision, but also in terms of work handling capabilities.

Our existing machines were coming to the end of their useful lives and we could see that, particularly in a compact operation such as ours, the ability to harness the full potential of modern workhandling systems would provide us with a number of benefits".

* Market research - after carrying out a thorough market investigation, managing director of SORB, Mike Simpson, selected a machine from Prima Industrie UK.

The machine has a 4kW Platino laser, which can quickly and accurately profile up to 25mm mild steel, 15mm stainless steel and 10mm thick aluminium sheet.

It also provides 0.03mm cutting accuracy across its entire **machining envelope** of 3m x 1.5m.

The machine's flying **optics** design and high dynamics enable head speeds of up to 140m/min and accelerations of 12m/s² to be achieved.

Business development manager at SORB, David Smart, commented: "The Platino's ability to pierce material in around 0.5s and cut at up to 6.5m/min has substantially reduced cycle times and increased productivity, enabling us to reduce the effect of escalating raw material costs." He added: "Similarly, its inherent accuracy and **repeatability** has allowed us to tackle a much wider range of products than we could with the previous equipment".

* Work handling - the second important element in SORB's new laser installation is a purpose designed 14 storey Prima TowerServer work handling system.

The unit incorporates four additional pallet stations over the standard 10 storey model and has been custom engineered to fit snugly under the 5.3m high roof line at SORB's premises.

"There is a bolt at the top of the tower that is just 20mm from the roof and thanks to the skill of the Prima engineers, we did not have to do any building modifications at all," said Simpson.

Simpson said that the TowerServer delivers a range of productivity benefits.

"First and foremost, it gives us extra flexibility.

Unlike our previous machines, which needed operator input at the start and finish of each cycle to unload processed parts and position a new sheet of raw material, the TowerServer enables the Platino to run unattended.

Each of the 14 shelves has a capacity of 3 tonnes and incorporates an automatic loading and unloading system".

He continued: "By contrast, it might have taken three or four of us up to 10 min each time a large sheet, of say, 15mm material, was needed to be loaded on the previous machines.

With the tower unit, it is not only both faster and a lot safer, but also allows us to employ our workforce more effectively on skilled manufacturing tasks".

Smart added: "Likewise, it enables us to handle the more complex, precision, prototyping and short lead time work during the day shift, while customers' volume requirements can be processed throughout the night under 'lights out' conditions".

Hand in hand with SORB's new ability to run 24/7 is the increased material stockholding and accurate recording capabilities of the TowerServer unit.

The unit, said Prima to manufacturingtalk, effectively transforms it into an automated store.

Proniw explained that by having deliveries of raw material loaded directly on to its pallets, the disruption and potential health and safety hazards associated with moving large sheets around a busy production shop have now been eliminated.

While the installation will keep running unattended until it runs out of material or has completed all of its jobs, an additional refinement built into its offline programming capabilities enables Simpson to remotely interrogate and control the new equipment from home.

Simpson added: "The automation has been fantastic, especially as Prima's software allows me to update a production list remotely.

I can be at home and change the order of sheets being processed or increase or decrease the quantity, all while the machine is cutting.

Prima has been very responsive in tailoring the installation to our particular requirements.

We have also received excellent support in terms of training and general hand-holding, enabling us to maximise the return on our investment".

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He continued: "The equipment provides increased capacity and improved accuracy over the two machines it has replaced, while permitting us to utilise our workforce more effectively.

We have found Prima to be a great company to work with.

They have even offered to put me on their service engineers course, proving that they are really committed to ensuring we get the most out of our installation".

The laser cell investment has enabled SORB to compete aggressively for an ever widening range of work.

The company said it had already recorded a dramatic increase in business during the past 12 months.

Simpson concluded: "But you won't see any flash cars outside our company.

All the money goes inside the building.

Investment in the best technology has always been my philosophy and our latest purchase is already leading to more manufacturing and business opportunities".

About Prima Industrie UK - Coventry-based Prima Industrie UK draws on the established track record of its Italian parent organisation, Prima Industrie, a world leader with 30 years experience in the design, development and manufacture of **laser cutting machines** and automation solutions.

Prima UK provides sales, installation and servicing for a wide range of new and pre-owned 2D and 3D cutting machines that are used by customers in industries as diverse as aerospace, automotive, marine and electrical equipment manufacture.

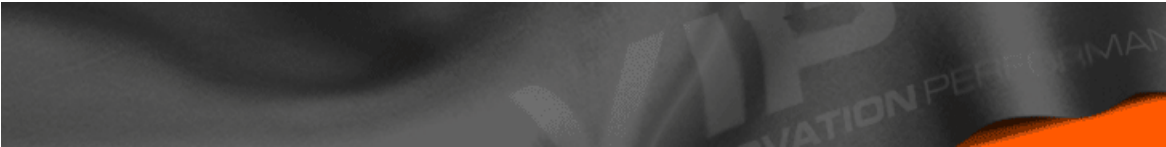
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