



CNC made it happen

Orchid Furniture in Kilsyth, Melbourne has a very impressive record of growth. In the space of just 4 years Directors Bernard Galea and Brett Atherton have built a company from scratch to one with state of the art production facilities, 22 employees and a diverse range of customers. Their customers include some of the best-known names in Retail and Commercial furniture across Australia and NZ. Their 'in house' capabilities encompass a polish shop, cut to size service, edging to 20mm, rout and bore and curved component edging. While there's been lots of hard work and long hours Bernard and Brett are the first to admit that this growth has been the result of using the best technology available.

"We wanted to build a business based on manufacturing and assembling components for our customers and decided right from the start to not compete with them by producing our own product range" says Bernard. Having made that fundamental decision Brett and Bernard set about building their business against a simple premise. "We needed to be able to produce our customers products cheaper, faster and with as good or better quality than they could themselves otherwise why would they give us their business? However we couldn't buy materials cheaper or rent buildings for less or pay people less than our customers so to stand out we needed the best technology available". To this end Orchids first investment was a machining centre from Weeke, the CNC specialists of the German Homag Group. "We knew this would give us the best quality routing, be reliable and give us real credibility with our customers. The old saying 'you only get one chance to make a good first impression' was very important to a start up business like ours, so we started with the best. Also as I would be the one operating it I took particular interest in the Software. Homag's 'Woodwop' is head and shoulders above the other packages we looked at" comments Brett

From here 2 Beam saws, a high spec Edger and another CNC were added – all from the Homag Group. The latest Holzma Beamsaw has Auto panel loading which makes a big difference with the 800 '12 x 6' sheets Orchid process in an average month. "The cut qualities perfect and it has some really smart software built in, like auto slowdown when cutting to dust and exiting delicate panels" notes Brett

The Brandt Edger works hard too with up to 30,000 lineal metres of edge applied per month. "The 'on board' corner rounding and glue scrapers are a big productivity boost for us as we completely avoid double handling and cleaning of edges" .

The machines are all linked with Cutrite, the Homag groups Optimising and Inventory control system. This starts with labels generated at the saw and continues through the process via barcodes. "We

were really impressed by how flexible CutRite was and the high level of really practical functions it has. We also liked its being modular which has allowed us to just get what we needed for our particular business” says Bernard.

You might think with all that behind them Orchid would have been content to sit back and reap the benefits of their investments but that’s not how Bernard and Brett operate. “Our customers are pretty much 50/50 shop fitters and commercial furniture suppliers, both of which have a high demand for shaped components. However we noticed many of our customers shied away from including many shapes in their designs because high labour costs and difficulty of manufacture, particularly edging, made it prohibitive” comments Bernard.

Always on the lookout for ways to improve their service to existing and new customers Orchid dipped their toe in the water with Brandt’s shaped component Edger. “We went for the Brandt because it’s a unique design where you vacuum clamp the component and move the gluing and edging head around them. Unlike other manual systems this made edging large components possible” said Brett. This was a big hit with Orchid’s customers to the point that they needed to automate this process to keep up with demand. Enter the new Homag BAZ 322 combined Router and Edgebander.

With the BAZ, Orchid have completely automated the shaping and edging processes, all in one compact, high tech package. “We’re now doing this work around 15 times faster and can do perfect ‘butt’ joints on 360 degree components”. While the BAZ is shaping, applying and finishing the edge on one side, Brett is unloading a finished component and loading a new blank on the other. “The results we’re getting are fantastic and it’s all done in one spot so there’s no chance of handling damage. We also have virtually complete design freedom so we can produce exactly what our customers really want and their delighted with that. We’re also finding that ‘1 offs’ are just as practical as larger runs and that’s opening new doors too”. Orchid have a clear objective of delivering lead times around half the industry norm and the BAZ is a key to achieving this. “We achieve around 5 to 7 days on Commercial tops and can do even better when a customer’s working to a tight deadline”

The decision to go with another machine from the Homag Group was easy. “Homag pioneered and perfected this technology and in our view are well ahead of everyone else in this field. We were also aware of the disastrous experience another company had who purchased a ‘copy’. We certainly weren’t going to take any risks with our customer’s businesses”

Service and backup has been first class – right from the start. “Homag have the best products and back this up with the right people. If you’re serious about building your business based on producing superior products at lower piece costs with maximum reliability then you can’t do better than Homag”