Vinyl Curtains Help Manufacturer Split the Difference in Shared Space

As a leading designer and manufacturer of hydraulic motion control systems, the Power-Packer division of Milwaukee, WI-based Actuant Corp. has changed location to accommodate its business and size. Recently, the company expanded some of its manufacturing to a facility in Glendale, WI, that it would share with another Actuant division, Gardner Bender, a maker of electrical tools and supplies. To ensure that the new space would work for Power-Packer's manufacturing needs and Gardner Bender's warehouse needs, Power-Packer decided to purchase and install curtain partitions made by Goff's Curtain Walls, based in Pewaukee, WI.

"We have two completely different functions going on in this area that need to be separated, especially considering the precision nature of our product," says Christopher Beck, process engineer for Power-Packer. The high-pressure hydraulic actuation systems the company makes are used to open and close automobile convertible tops. While a clean-room environment is not needed, the manufacturing process does require an above-average level of debris- and temperature-control to ensure quality. Aware of curtain walls, Beck contacted Goff's, who put him in touch with a customer who used their product. "They looked ideal for our needs," he says.

In a traditional plant, Actuant would have most likely made permanent alterations by using a contractor. Walls would be constructed and other building operations would take place, all of which would have disrupted the manufacturing operation, costing the company time and money. At the newly expanded facility, the curtain walls went up in one day, were a fraction of the cost of a wall, and gave Power-Packer the opportunity to alter the space as their needs change. "They section off the larger space, look good and are easy to move," says Beck. The curtains were made in the company's colors, and feature the company's logo.

"We have a number of visitors in the production area," says Beck, "including customers, vendors and investors. When they visit here, they'll see our high-tech machinery, not the boxes and racks on the Gardner Bender side."

From the top down, the curtain walls use a 16-gauge steel channel track and roller system capable of holding four 40-ft.-wide by 18-ft.-high panels made of heavy-duty 14-gauge vinyl. Full-length Velcro strips connect the panels to prevent debris from entering the production area, yet allow the curtains to be easily opened for moving the panels or give access to equipment.

Furthermore, the warehouse area on the other side does not require the same level of lighting as the production side. The curtain walls prevent light dispersal outside of the desired area for more efficient use of electricity. Actuant also brought in a set of curtain walls to create an employee exercise area with basketball court and volleyball net.

Though the 160-ft.-long curtain section helps the company meet current production needs, Beck says he'll move or add to the flexible walls as production lines are added. The quick installation time means that when he does, the company will be back to work the next day.

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