

Developments in Equipment

How many measurements does it take to make a custom frame?

by Robert Jolkovski

Glazing, matting, backing, fillet, moulding, and, of course, a piece of artwork are among the items that comprise a custom frame. All of these have to be carefully and correctly measured and cut. One mistake and the frame job is quite possibly ruined, or at least delayed, with both material and time wasted. Whether you operate a one-person shop, or a multi-location operation, the principle is the same: efficient framing requires efficient and correct measurements.

A similar situation exists in many manufacturing plants where the final product consists of numerous parts. Of course, unlike custom framing, many manufacturing operations are usually using many identical parts at a time. Therefore, the manufacturing engineer has the luxury of creating a "set up" for making parts identical. In the old days, this meant creating jigs and fixtures to position the cutting tool to operate repetitively with little or no variation.

Nowadays, material is measured and cut by machines equipped with electronic measurement devices. The simplest of these is the Digital Readout (DRO). The DRO is a measuring tool attached to a metal-cutting machine. It provides an accurate location, in one or more dimensions, and displays that location as a number (inches or metric).

The next step in the evolution of manufacturing tools was the Computer Numerical Controlled (CNC) machine tool. This type of tool uses a computer program to move the cutting tool in a precise path. An example of this adapted for the framing industry is the computerized mat cutter.

How do we in the framing industry find new ways to get things done? Product developers in our industry often see the opportunity in other industries for a crossover product useful to framing. What's coming to our industry is a small part of the digital revolution. We are seeing the

beginning of digital measurement in many of the miter saws available from suppliers in our industry.

My company recently introduced the Producer digital miter saw table. This item is designed to locate the inside corner of frame moulding with a pointer attached to the digital readout. Instead of lining up the inside moulding edge with a mark on the measuring table, the user moves the slider along the saw fence until the required measurement appears on the display (in fractions, decimals or metric units). When the moulding touches the pointer, the saw is set to cut correctly.

For framers who do not operate on a large production level, investing in this type of equipment may seem unnecessary. Framers who regularly use chop moulding services enjoy the convenience. However, this convenience brings a price, which can

cut into profits. Chop service is not going away. And it shouldn't as it serves a real need in the industry. But if a framer wants to stock a small selection of his or her most popular mouldings, then a tool for accurate cutting in the shop is important. A digital miter saw can be of use in this type of situation.

What's the downside? You will make more money and have more time. Only kidding. That's

not a downside, but you will have to pay for the new equipment. But with increased efficiency, the equipment will pay for itself. For instance, if you save \$25 to \$30 in labor and materials per frame job, it might take 50 or so jobs to pay for it (assuming the equipment is under \$1500).

Quicker, more accurate measurement make framing operations of all sizes more profitable. How you use this extra return is up to you.



Using the technology of a digital miter saw can help increase the efficiency in framing.

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